

God-Fearers: A Solution to the Ancient Problem of the Identity of the Sabians

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Contents: Premise (pp.1-3) – 1) The Etymological Model (pp.3-6) – 2) The Origins of the Name (pp.6-7) – 3) The Hebrew Root *SHUBH* (pp.8-9) – 4) Conversion (pp.9-10) – 5) Pagan Monotheism (p.11) – 6) The “Pious” Roman Emperors (pp.11-13) – 7) The Cult of the Most-High God. Titles and Onomastics (pp.13-15) – 8) *Eusebeia* and *Gnòsis* (pp.15-16) – 9) Vincentius’ Tomb (16-18) – 10) *Tertium Genus* (pp.18-22) – 11) Sabians = “Adherents of the Prevailing Religion” (pp.22-23) – 12) *Hypsistarii*, *Sebòmenoi/Phoboùmenoi tòn Theòn*, *Metuentes*, *Theosebèis*, *Massaliani*, *Sabbàtistai*, *Caelicolae*, *Hunafâ*’ (pp.23-26) – 13) The Sabians according to Earlier Islamic Sources (pp.26-29) – 14) The First Latin Translation of the *Kuràn*: Sabians = Christians? (pp.29-32) – 15) Harrànians’ Cult of the Most-High God (pp.32-36) – 16) A Strictly Etymological Proposal (pp.36-38) – Conclusions (pp.38-41) – List of Abbreviations (pp.43-45) – Notes nrs.1-342 (pp.47-92).

Premise

The aim of the present work is to shed some light on a long-standing mystery, the identity of the Sabians. Five years ago, indeed, we published a short study just on the same subject ¹ where we presented a theory that nobody else had ever advanced: the substantial equivalence of the Sabians with the loose religious group of the God-Fearers ² (or, even better, God-Worshippers, *i.e.* devotees of the Most-High God ³), whose importance and wide ⁴ diffusion geographically and chronologically is now accepted ⁵. Almost twenty-five years ago (1977), the exceptional archaeological discovery in the site of the ancient city of Aphrodisia of a big stele ⁶, probably placed at the entrance of the local synagogue, mentioning the names of fifty-four “pious God-fearers” (*òsioi theosebîs*) beside those of sixty-nine Jews (plus three proselytes ⁷) in their quality of donors ⁸, in fact, seemed finally to have put an end to a fruitless discussion, which had been going on for no less than sixty years, about the existence of this group ⁹. Unfortunately, the edition in Italian of our essay and the small number of libraries and scholars we could contact at that time limited its impact, in spite of the favourable impression it made upon the scholars who had the possibility to read the study.

This is one of the main reasons why we have decided to take up the subject again; the second, and more important one, is that we have gathered new and relevant pieces of information in support of our theory during recent last years, a circumstance that allows us not only to add further details to the picture already drawn in our previous study, but also to underline the extent to which

the facts collected relate to one another with more accuracy and to point out better the weight of each one of them. Finally, we have paid more attention to the methodological aspects of the research, since we believe that the main cause of the unsuccessful results of the different authors who have been concerned with the Sabian “enigma” depends on methodological errors; in other words, we will show that there was a systematic fault in the scientific means of approaching the matter, especially concerning the etymological solutions to the problem of the meaning of the term “Sabian”, as well as how the historical value of textual evidence has been taken into account.

We think it is convenient to stress again the ever-lasting validity of the “Principle of Economy”: under the same conditions, it is better to choose a theory which in explaining the facts worth less exceptions; that is, the best theory is the simplest one.

The theory still most widely accepted, as we are going to consider now, is far from being the simplest one. Though many scholars have spent their energies to solve “the Sabians’ mysteries”¹⁰, though no doubt the picture of the religious beliefs and practises of the Harranians (that is to say, the sole representatives of “the people of the Sabians”¹¹ whose historical existence has been proved with certainty) is now much better determined¹² than a hundred and fifty years ago, when *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* appeared in St. Petersburg, the leading ideas expressed by the Russian orientalist Daniel Chwolson in this monumental work¹³ are still commonly accepted, in particular: 1) the difference between “true Sabians” (the *Sabi’ùn* quoted three times by Muhammad in the *Qur’àn* side by side with Jews and Christians, without adding any more information about them¹⁴) and “false Sabians” (normally identified with the inhabitants of Harràn, the Sumero-Babylonian Moon-God *Sin*’s ancient cultic capital in Upper Mesopotamia, whose piety was still alive during the Middle Ages¹⁵; 2) the identification of “true Sabians” with the small baptismal group of Mandaeans who lived in Muhammad’s times (as they do now) in the marshy South-Mesopotamian region, and who were called sometimes by the nickname *Subbi* or *Subba* by their neighbours¹⁶.

Chwolson’s style of arguing seems easy, and it can be synthesized as follows: since Muhammad could not include a pagan community in the “People of the Book”, to which Jews and Christians surely belonged, the Harranians cannot but lie when professing themselves “Sabians” (and in this sense the famous story of the meeting/dispute between Caliph al-Ma’mùn and the Harranians contained in al-Nadim’s *Fihrist* chapter X plays a decisive role, as the perfect thing for this occasion¹⁷; on the other hand, if the Harranian people are not the *Sabi’ùn* mentioned in *Suras* II, V and XXII laconic verses, there is no doubt that the Prophet had somebody else in mind: but who are the members of this unknown monotheistic community? The phonetic likeness *Subbi-Sàbi’ùn* provides Chwolson with the answer he wishes¹⁸.

But this solution is only apparently easy: it requires both a falsehood on the part of the Harranians who wanted to defend at any cost their ancient religious traditions, and an interested misunderstanding by the Islamic authorities who were well-disposed to turn a blind eye on a pagan community *à outrance* in exchange for money (the well-known *leit-motiv* of the Near-Eastern peoples’ innate corruption); moreover, it lets a

very small religious group grow up in Muhammad's mind until it becomes a Universal Religion like Christianity and Judaism, as it requires a rather free use of the rules of Etymology (and it is not surprising that very soon the latter point in Chwolson's thesis was bitterly criticized). This is why we say that Chwolson fails not only in working out the simplest theory, but just a simple one, unless one uses the word as a fable, rather than as something worthy to the word Science.

It goes without saying that if all the pieces of evidence in the new pattern which we are going to provide were demonstrated ¹⁹beyond any doubt, we would not have spent so many words arguing and criticizing a book written a hundred an fifty years ago, even if – as we have already said – its theoretical issues are those which are to be found in most encyclopaedias and dictionaries. But we believe that all means are valid to show how much the opening of an alternative horizon on the Sabian problem is needed: it will lead the scholars' efforts in a direction that might have been totally ignored, without the material collected here. In other words, we hope that, with the help of our suggestions, new evidence will come to light, strengthening our arguments' validity.

The Etymological Model

It is impossible to be grateful enough to the Italian scholar Giovanni Semerano for the work which he has carried out throughout his life (he is now ninety-two years old!) in the field of Etymology. In fact, nobody before him, had proved in the same degree the unbelievable conservative power of language and the practical consequences of this fact on a historical level. For those who do not yet know this learned man or the struggles he had to fight to make his revolutionary position known, we need only to quote his main work, *Le origini della cultura europea* ²⁰ (*The Origins of the European culture*) and the more recent book *L'infinito: un equivoco millenario* ²¹ (*Infinity: a millenary mistake*), which another Italian scholar, the philosopher Emanuele Severino, once called “una festa dell'intelligenza”. Why such a title? And why should it represent “a feast of the intelligence”? ²² Because Semerano for the first time sweeps away an old idea, which he defines in terms of “Indoeuropean Mirage” ²³, implying that the linguistic roots of Italian, in particular, and those of other European languages, more generally, for the most part go back to old Greek or to Latin (more remotely, to Sanscrit as well). The issues linked to such a wrong use of Etymology's rules were often quite funny: let us recall here only the once common etymological explanation of the word “Italia”, which the “Indoeuropean Mirage” went as far as connecting to the Latin term *vitulus*, obtaining consequently the curious result: “Italia” = “Terra dei Vitelli” (“the Calves' Country”)! ²⁴

Against such miracles of ingenuity, in virtue of which everything becomes possible, Semerano rightly raised the plain objection that the initial “i” in the word

“Italia” is long, whereas in the word *vitulus* it is short ²⁵; this briefly means that in the first case the vowel “i” belongs to the word’s root, while in the second one it does not: nothing else is necessary to demonstrate that such an inference is wrong, and with it thousands and thousands of others. It is now easy to understand why Semerano felt the need to reconsider during his long and not always happy life ²⁶ roughly twenty-five thousands words ²⁷, both common nouns and proper names, in old Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, German, English, Slavic, together with their alleged original Indoeuropean roots systematically collected by classical linguists. Thus to a great extent, he took on the task of rewriting Europe’s linguistic history, an activity which coincided eventually with rewriting the history of the European culture itself: a huge task, indeed!

As we are writing these pages, we realize that it is the 27th of January, a date which Italy and other European countries, plus Israel and the U.S.A., decided a few years ago to celebrate as a “Memorial Day”, in order to show to the new generations the atrocities of the Holocaust – the *Shoah* – during the past Second World War, so that nobody ever forgets Nazi-Fascist barbarity and, above all, so that such horror should never repeat itself in the course of human history. The present reference to anti-Semitism is not casual. In fact what Semerano calls the “Indoeuropean Mirage” saw the light just at the beginning of XIX century together with the birth of Comparative Linguistics, but it owed its existence to something that had nothing to do with a scientific and neutral interest in ancient languages: it was a floating mine, it was racism ²⁸. The proud sense of their own superiority over Semitic populations expressed by the Germans and other European peoples started from an unconscious hate that slowly transformed itself into an open will of destruction; and it was just the same absurd spirit of self-excellence that invented the legend of the beautiful and terrible Indo-European race, coming from the deep Asian steppes, riding on their fast wild horses, whose assigned destiny was the conquest of the world. “We have been searching everywhere - Semerano says - but, in spite of our sincere efforts, we have found no trace of the Indoeuropeans at all” ²⁹. Nor of their imaginary language, of course.

Though such a primary language never existed on the face of earth, it had a very big influence – as everybody knows - on a cultural level anyway. Its most important effect in the field of the human sciences was the construction of a strong high wall between the Aryans and most of the Near Eastern peoples settled along approximately the same natural border-line, the Euphrates river, which in Imperial times divided the Roman State from Persia so that nobody was able to cross it nor to look beyond it any longer. The Europeans preferred to be blind rather than to recognise any sort of kinship with their Semitic neighbours. We have already stressed the consequences of such an attitude in connection to the term “Italia”: it is better to be akin to calves than to Arabs and Jews!

Putting aside humour, the scandal of the long silences that the reader so often meets when opening any old Greek or Latin etymological dictionary (with such laconic expressions as “etymology: unknown”, “ignorée”, “inconnue”, “unbekannt”)³⁰

was real, but no scholar ever wondered or raised objections in front of the vacuum: in spite of such a great distance in terms of space and time, it was to the ancient

Pag. 4

Indian civilization that linguists should continue to present their questions; if Sanscrit does not answer, the answer does not exist at all ³¹. And yet just one step across a much closer border was needed to fill a lot of those empty spaces: but who would be courageous and fearless enough to do it?

Beyond such a thin and hard to cross borderline, in fact, a very rich treasure lies: the Accadian lexicon ³². There, in the interiors of such a golden mine available to linguists at least since the middle of the XIX century ³³, even the right meaning of the noun “Italia” was hidden together with a “host” of other ones, so that it was not difficult at this point to connect the Italian term with the Accadian lemma *attalu* = “occident, west, sunset”, coming thus to the entirely intelligible result “Italia” = “Country of the West”³⁴. We have already said it: solutions must be easy or they are not real ones. What did the old Greeks have in mind when naming the Italian peninsula *Esperia*, but “the country of the west”? On the other hand, the initial letter of the Accadian word perfectly agrees with first “i” of the Italian noun by quantity: thus the present solution is satisfying not only from a logical point of view, since it allows us to throw away a meaningless definition in exchange of a meaningful one, but also from the structural requirements of Phonetics, just as it should be.

In the Near Eastern Antiquity, Accadian was the first international writing normally in use, because it was the language that was used for royal chancellery acts and all other sorts of documents during almost fifteen hundred years. That is the main reason why Accadian has to be chosen instead of Sanscrit: the former was widely spread many centuries before the latter came into existence. One should reverse the way followed by classical scholars until now: when an old Greek or a Latin root seems to go back to the Indian milieu, these are just surface impressions or, even better, mirror effects; when such a case does happen, in fact, the Sanscrit root goes systematically back in its turn to an Accadian antecedent, common to both European classical languages and to Indian ones ³⁵.

The finding of a new original framework to be applied in etymological research represents a real Copernican revolution ³⁶ not only in the field of Linguistics: it implies also an alternative historical model for the development of the Near East ancient civilizations and for their mutual relationships, in other words a new idea regarding the progress of mankind and its main starting points. As the entirely unexpected discovery of Ebla by Italian archaeologists had already shown at the end of the sixties and even more in the next decades, by stressing the absolute importance of this part of the Ancient World, one of the most significant “cultural engines” in the course of human history lay geographically in the Syro-Mesopotamian area: the art of writing, namely the most commonly accepted reference-mark for the beginning of the historical age, flourished in that region when men were still wandering partially in shadows along the Nile and Indo river valleys ³⁷.

In the next pages we will perform an operation which not even our courageous and fearless professor Semerano, notwithstanding his sincere passion for the truth,

managed, since such a thing was outside his own range of activities. If, as Semerano has proved with certainty, the incredible enduring power of Accadian forms has to be recognized in the European classical languages as well as into modern ones, there is no reason for not supposing that a similar phenomenon had happened in the Near

Pag. 5

Eastern linguistic sphere. In reality, the influence of Accadian on the languages of the Semitic branch is among the facts more commonly accepted by scholars, as orientalists have recognized from a long time similar inter-linguistic relations, both from a diachronic and synchronic point of view: but much work must still be done in this sense and, as it is evident that the European cultural context requires it, many past errors must be corrected in this field of research too. What failed to be understood up to now, in fact, is the full importance of the central role of the Accadian language, so that it appears to be the primary pattern which one should make reference to when, as general rule, etymological problems are at stake. We shall try to show, therefore, how strong the conservative power of the Accadian linguistic bulk had been even in reference to the problem which we are concerned with, the Sabians: obviously, it is a matter of Etymology, but we believe that our etymological solution is worthy of interest, by comparing it to the other ones which were proposed till now, for the simple reason that it is not an abstract hypothesis, good for some scholarly minds, as those were; on the contrary, it stands on solid theoretical grounds, because it agrees not only with phonetic general rules, but also with the historical developments of religions since Antiquity up to the Middle Ages throughout the Near Eastern area. Last but not least, our theory also fulfils the duties involved by the already quoted “Principle of Economy”: for the first time, it makes a clean sweep of the artificial difference “true Sabians” - “false Sabians” in a satisfactory way, namely without resorting – as J. Pedersen in the twenties (and J. Hjarpe who followed his opinion more recently) did – to the concept of Gnosis³⁸. It is true, in fact, that Pedersen’s solution gets over Chwolson’s incongruities by finding a single name for the subject implied by Muhammad’s words and by the religious-historical framework to come, with the well known difficulties of according several self-styled or alleged “Sabian” communities to the *Koran*’s enigmatic group; however the idea of rendering in both cases the Sabians equal to Gnostics does not explain anything, because concepts like Gnosis and Gnosticism are in everybody’s opinion so hazy and loose that they can never help to solve a problem of identity, mostly when the problem in question is represented by such a complex phenomenon as Sabianism.

The Origins of the Name

We should repeat here what we wrote in our previous study. By observing the uncertainty and the hesitations that ancient Koranic commentators and Islamic traditionists - but also Muslim Middle Ages’ historians, geographers, heresiologists

etc. - show when the subject “Sabians” comes into play, it is difficult not to have the impression of dealing with a non-Arabic word. In fact there is no mutual consent among all these learned men about the true meaning of the word and its linguistic root, neither about the right way of writing and pronouncing it: so, one may usually find beside the Arabic plural written form *Sàbi'ùn*, the collective forms *Sàbi'a* and

Pag- 6

Sàba; in the meantime, according to one of the most famous ancient *mufasssirùn*, al-Zamakhshari, Koranic sayers would have frequently pronounced the word *al-Sàbùn*, without *hamza* ³⁹. Those are just a handful of examples, but we believe that they are sufficient to grasp the linguistic conditions of the problem. Confusion increases, besides, when one thinks over the existence of two different, though very closely inter-related Arabic roots, *SB'* and *SBW*, and consequently of two corresponding verbal forms, *saba'a* and *sabà*, from which the name *Sàbi* (sing.)/*Sàbi'ùn* (plur.) is generally supposed to derive ⁴⁰. We hope that our *I Sebòmenoi* have explained the various semantic values of these verbs ⁴¹ clearly enough, and we find it unnecessary, therefore, to look back to the historical reasons that probably gave birth to such different meanings once again.

No doubt, the fact that the word does appear for the first time within the *Qur'àn* cannot prove anything about its own origins, because it is not by evidence of this kind that one may know whether the noun belongs or not to the Arabic linguistic tradition: as the latest research has shown with more and more certainty, poetry writings which traditionally were considered to be of pure Arabic production, because of their composition going back to the so-called *Ayyàm al-Arab*, belong on the contrary to the Muslim age and are not able, therefore, to give a real portrait of the life of those legendary days, nor to inform us about the language really spoken in such a distant past ⁴². So, when one does not find the verbs *saba'a/sabà* nor the name(s) *Sàbi/Sàbi'ùn* (*Sàbi'a* etc.) among the lyrical words used by the poets of the *Ayyàm al-Arab*, it does not mean that this group of terms is really old, since the *Qur'àn* – as, on the other hand, it never ceased of being considered such in the Muslim world – is the pure Arabic linguistic prototype ⁴³.

Likewise, we are not helped by the textual evidence contained within several *hadith* and *sira*'s writings ⁴⁴, which J. Wellhausen already collected and commented on for the most part one century ago ⁴⁵: the fact that the verb *saba'a* and the noun *Sàbi* ⁴⁶ (the latter being used always in its singular form ⁴⁷) are applied in these texts in reference to Muhammad and to the earlier members of the Muslim community ⁴⁸ does not imply that such words were of common use in Muhammad's times or before him by the Arabic speakers. Consequently, D.S. Margoliouth seems to be right when expressing the opinion that “*saba'a*, ‘he changed his religion’, ... appears to be an inference from the application of the name to Muhammad and his followers” ⁴⁹. In absence of other elements, it is surely more correct to follow this way of reasoning, and thus to think that – at least in relation to one (but a very important one, as we shall see) of the semantic values of the root *SB'* – one has to do with a vicious circle. The reason why the Arabic verb *saba'a* could be applied to Islam's first proselytes and to the Prophet who was announcing Allah and His Holy Word to mankind would not be that its meaning was “to change religion” or “to be converted” at those early times already; on the contrary, the verbal form would have been forced to include *also* that special meaning later on, only because all these people – and Muhammad

with them - were usually described by their Meccan opponents by an epithet like “Sabians”⁵⁰.

Pag. 7

The Hebrew Root SHUBH

Actually such an opinion, to which we subscribed without reserve in our previous study, could only be half a truth. There exists in fact the Hebrew root *SHUBH* which is very interesting for our purposes, even if nobody – as far as we know – ever recognised any inter-linguistic relation between it and the two Arabic roots which we are dealing with. W.L. Holladay, for example, when surveying in chapter I of his *The root SHUBH in the Old Testament*, various instances of “the root in cognate languages”, records the verb *tawaba* which “occurs in classical Arabic in a great variety of meanings, some of them paralleling Hebrew usage. According to Lane’s *Lexicon*⁵¹ the verb in the first form has the meaning ‘he returned to a place to which he had come before’, exactly the central meaning which we shall assign to *shùbh*”; then, after having remembered two further uses of the verb in the IV form (causative) and in the X form (reflexive), he reckons among the “less assured proposals” a Jacob Barth’s suggestion, according to which “the adjectives *sobhàbh*, *sobhèbh* ‘disloyal, faithless’, and the noun *meshùbhà* ‘faithlessness’, are to be distinguished from the Semitic root *twb*, and to be rather connected with the Arabic root *s’b=syb*, ‘free, untrammelled’ ”⁵².

All this is rather strange, all the more so as the root *SHUBH* has been studied at length by scholars, who have analysed the abundant occurrence of the related verbs, nouns and adjectives through Old Testament texts, in order to deepen, in particular, the conception of apostasy and repentance in ancient Hebraic society⁵³. Now, it is true that *SHUBH* and *SB’/SBW* diverge for many aspects and so can be only in part paralleled, but their convergence is all the more striking at least for one essential point: both roots show a characteristic ambiguity when expressing the relation between Man and God, an ambiguity which should be seen – we believe - as a consequence of the historical difficulties of focusing the idea of religious Conversion.

In other words, both roots which - it is worth stating here – include into their semantic field some basic meanings of physical motion without further implication, such as “to return, to revert (in ownership), to change into” (Hebrew) and “to incline, to be inclined, to tend, to lean” (Arabic), show in reference to religious meanings, also included by full right into their semantic field, a never-ending oscillation, a dialectics Good-Evil being destined to never stop, which reveals itself to be essentially the same in both cases. If, then, the Hebrew root may express the idea of “going away from God”, *sc.* of “apostasy”, and also at the same time that one of “return to God”, *sc.* of “repentance”, the Arabic root on the other side does not cease to hesitate between the idea of “inclining in the wrong direction (far from God)”, *sc.* of “apostasy”, and that one of “inclining in the right direction (towards God)”, *sc.* of “conversion”, even if the latter semantic value seems to fade in the background in comparison with the former one according to lexicographers and other interpreters⁵⁴.

To dwell upon the reason why the semantic nuance of “conversion” replaced in Arabic the semantic nuance of “repentance” expressed by the Hebrew root would seem at first sight a waste of time, but we don’t find it completely useless to spend

Pag. 8

some words upon that aspect anyway. Arabians, or rather Muslims, did not get the One True God from the beginning, and had to wait for thousands of years for Muhammad’s prophecy and the chance to turn themselves to God by renouncing their old idols. It was the historical event of Allah’s Revelation by the Prophet that rendered the idea of Conversion completely real. Indeed, even before the beginning of the Muslim era, it was possible for any Arab to convert himself. But to What? To Whom? There were persons among the Arabs converted to Christianity or to Judaism, of course, namely Christian and Jewish Arabian communities whose importance was sometimes far from meagre mostly since the fifth century C.E. onwards⁵⁵, but it was a minority phenomenon, chiefly in relation to central Arabia’s desert regions⁵⁶, and in any case it lacked time to influence the lexicon of classical Arabic⁵⁷. The main problem for the Jews, on the contrary, was always to go astray, to forget the Law of God and to fall down into idolatry; the plain word “Conversion”, which everybody takes for granted nowadays, meant nothing for them, since they were the elect and thus they could risk losing God only because of their sins. There was no need to look for Him, He was standing beside them, with them, since⁵⁸ the Covenant between Him and Abraham had been made once for all: that is why the Hebrew root expresses the idea of “going away and coming back to the departure point”⁵⁹, rather than that one of “turning oneself towards a certain direction”.

As we shall observe, the situation changes when Jews come in close contact with other peoples, that is when Proselytism begins to grow till it becomes a socially significant phenomenon both in Palestine and throughout the Diaspora communities⁶⁰. But in order to name these men and women, whose number increased as time passed, who heard the call of *Yahwè* and who felt the need of “crossing the boundary and becoming a Jew”⁶¹ or of taking part of groups devoted to the Hebraic religion following some of its many precepts⁶², there generally existed other technical terms, or rather terms which gained over the course of centuries an unambiguous sense⁶³.

Conversion

Actually, the general idea of Conversion had a significant historical development, and thus in the first period of the Christian era it was just at its very beginning, though the process had started centuries before and was to progress for many centuries. It is not possible to discuss here the history of the concept of Conversion, nor to follow the very slow evolution of the spiritual sense in the human societies of the ancient world. We must limit ourselves to look at some of Greek verbs/nouns

most usually employed – beyond the term already noted – to translate the event in question, such as *epistréphein/epistrophé* and *metanoéin/metánoia* ⁶⁴, or to look at the parallel words in Hebrew when the texts to analyze are for example the Old Testament writings ⁶⁵, to realize how long and tortuous was the way leading to a full consciousness of that

Pag. 9

phenomenon: there came into light a special kind of religious feeling, a psychological event wholly different from any other one, and a subsequent chain of actions addressed towards a well determined goal, which needed only a single word in order to be clearly denoted. But where were the difficulties? What was so difficult to understand and to say by using just one word? To tell the truth, speaking of such a theme brings about a huge problem, and this may explain why, also in modern times, very few scholars feel like taking into consideration this subject: A.D. Nock's *Conversion. The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* ⁶⁶ is an absolute exception on a bibliographical level, mostly because as he himself states: "This process of attraction has in the main been studied from the Christian point of view. What I have here tried to do is to look at it from the outside, and to that end I have devoted a substantial part of this book to a presentation of the advance in this same world of other forms of religion, many of them eastern in origins, and of other ways of life which also won adherents". Nock ⁶⁷ stresses just from the outset a conceptual distinction, namely between the psychological process of "Conversion" and a less binding condition of getting spiritually involved such as "Adhesion" to a new religious cult and/or to new deities generally imported into one's country from the outside by invaders ⁶⁸. Nevertheless, if the distinction is surely important for focusing on what happens in a man's soul when he has to make with this sort of spiritual – and often practical too - choices, it is much less significant from an historical point of view.

In the latter sense, what really counts a lot is another factor, that is the deep transformational process which a society undergoes when it is invested by a strong religious stream, by a high spiritual fever. It is not accidental that some scholars have presented the religious groups which are at the centre of our attention under alternative names such as "Sympathizers" ⁶⁹ or just as "Adherents" ⁷⁰, instead of the usual "God-Fearers" (*Phoboùmenoi tôn Theòn, Metuentes Deum*) and/or "God-Worshippers" (*Sebòmenoi tôn Theòn/Theosebéis, Colentes Deum*) ⁷¹: these names seem to correspond better to historical facts, since the people in question often did not change very much their way of life and their habits, limiting themselves to being present at the synagogue's rites in quality of simple attendants and to obeying to some precepts of Judaism that generally enjoyed a large sympathy among pagans, for instance *Sabbath's* observance with candles and oil lamps' lighting during Friday night or abstention from pork ⁷².

So, what is really the crucial factor for the historical development of religious ideas, and therefore for the human history itself, is not the more or less spiritual self-involving of individuals in a new faith or in new religious beliefs; it is the radical change of the religious horizon during the period included – we may follow here Nock's chronological model – from "Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo". It

is a space of time much longer than half a millennium, but it is difficult to consider a shorter one for examining what happened in men's souls and in their sensibility in respect to the role which religion had for human destiny ⁷³.

Pag. 10

Pagan Monotheism

Unfortunately, it is only very recently that people have begun to be conscious not only that a complex social-religious movement specially devoted to One Most-High God historically existed and was profoundly and widely diffused in the alleged "Pagan World" (into European, Near Eastern, North African regions included in the Roman Empire, and even beyond it), but also that this event eventually made it possible to speak about a phenomenon such as "Pagan Monotheism" ⁷⁴. Thirty years ago, in fact, and even less, probably such an expression would have been seen just as a blasphemy: the concept of "Henotheism" was the maximum that people were generally disposed to admit in reference to the Pagans' horizon of thought ⁷⁵; the conceptual space of "Monotheism" was – apologies for the pun – a monopoly of the Revealed Great Religions, a sort of private property of Judaism and Christianity.

But the new framework of Late Antiquity's "pagan" piety which begins step by step to be drawn in the last years weakens to a certain extent the traditional boundary line between Revealed, or Prophetic, Religions and Pagan Religions ⁷⁶, because - as the latest research makes more and more clear – what one thought to be still in existence during the first centuries of the Christian Era plainly did not exist any longer. It is of secondary importance to know which Supernatural Beings people believed in, which new, or old, deities they were devoted to, as well as which kind of hopes and expectations they placed in them: what deeply changed was people's attitude of mind towards Religion in general, not only in the sense that, after a certain historical period, people began to seek into Religion an answer to their fears, a solution to their problems about death, a virtual salvation (*soteria*)⁷⁷ to their souls.

Everybody knows, for instance, that since the second century C.E. a new faith in Oriental cults (Cybele, Isis, Mithra, Mèn, Sabazios, Dyonisos etc.) ⁷⁸ spread in the Roman Empire for the same reasons that previously had gained followers to Greek Mystic Religions, Orphism and Eleusynian Mysteries ⁷⁹, namely the novice's hope to obtain his own soul's salvation after having successfully passed the initiation rites by rule and after having consequently entered to be part by full right of some community of "Elects". Indeed, it is not such a thing which we mean by saying "change of people's attitude of mind", and therefore perhaps an example is needed to explain better what we wish to express.

In her bestseller *Hadrian's Memoirs* the French writer Marguerite Yourcenar too, according to a historically well-consolidated opinion, lets the old-aged emperor's choice for his successor to the imperial see finally fall on “a certain” senator Antoninus, whose “greatest care in respect of the old weary father” (who was often

Pag. 11

present with him at the Senate's assemblies) had brought him the nickname “Pious”: for Hadrian this detail seemed sufficient to consider him a trustworthy person ⁸⁰. The anecdote was always so successful that nobody ever doubted about its truthfulness, and there would be no problem. The problem arises, nevertheless, when one realizes that, unlike what happens in explaining in such a simple way the alleged origin of Antoninus' nickname, no reason is given to explain why Roman emperors after him continued for many centuries to be named in the same way – *i.e.* continued to display, as Roman Imperial coinage shows at great length, beside their own proper names and the traditional epithet *Augustus* (*Sebastòs* in Roman Empire's Greek coinage) ⁸¹ a further and meaningful one such as *Pius* (*Eusebés*) ⁸².

What has happened since that time? Why had Roman Emperors to declare openly their religious feelings, to exhibit publicly their strict religious observance? It is noteworthy that this usage did not cease with the end of the period of the so-called “Foster-Emperors” ⁸³ whose human qualities for lack of any degree of kinship between them (that is in absence of any family's dynastic line) had to be first of all wisdom, justice and courage; it is not possible, in other words, to find any special link between the beginnings of such displayed “devoutness” by Roman Emperors and the human qualities which they had to possess in order to be considered worthy of succeeding to the throne, as if this devoutness was just another way of naming “Philosophy”, a discipline which Marcus Aurelius was the best entitled among the Caesars to entrust the government of the State to ⁸⁴.

But even more striking is the choice of the word itself, *pius/eusebés*, when one reflects over the well-known circumstance that the term *pietas* in Latin, just like *eusébeia* in Greek, is quite a hazy synonymous of our “Religion” ⁸⁵: the idea of *pietas/ eusébeia*, in fact, had previously so much to do with civic affairs and municipal duties ⁸⁶ that there were dignities of the state, magistracies, just having the assignment of bearing the religious service; on the contrary, it had very little to do with spiritual feelings. When Antoninus together with his successors publicly states to be “Pious”, therefore, he is not simply admitting to be the *Pontifex Maximus* as already Octavian did one century and half before, collecting for the first time in the history of Rome into the hands of only one person – the *Princeps* - the political and the religious power ⁸⁷: we can be sure of that. It would seem that the Jews, whose struggles for independence came to a final end just under Antoninus' principality owing to their defeat during the Second Judaic War ⁸⁸(in consequence of which the tolerant position of the Roman government towards the Jews - which was not seldom something more than that, namely a political position in open support of them ⁸⁹- so deeply changed that new laws started to be put into force all over the Roman Empire

forbidding circumcision for converted Jews under penalty of death ⁹⁰: an event which historically stopped, or radically restrained anyway, the process of Judaic Proselytism) ⁹¹, after having lost the match on the battle-field, took their revenge on a cultural level, forcing the Romans to put aside their traditional religious tolerance towards subjected peoples, and almost to compete with them in religious affairs ⁹².

A puzzling document of the spiritual trend in action since the beginnings of our Era onwards throughout the Roman Empire is a curious apocryphal correspondence

Pag. 12

usually titled *Antoninus and the Rabbi* ⁹³. Both characters are not better defined by the anonymous author of the text, dating back to the III c. C.E., and belonging apparently to the Palestinian Jewry's doctrinal milieu. But the interest which it represents for the scholar is unquestionable beyond any philological observation. It provides in fact further proof of a moral and intellectual landscape where the influence of the most relevant feature of Jewish culture, the faith in One (Most-High) God, is spreading around with more and more strength ⁹⁴ till it arrives, as we have said, to be (quasi-) universally acknowledged in terms of something different from a strictly religious sign: it has already gained the status of the civilized man's typical reference-mark ⁹⁵, without which no highly-developed culture might blossom. Here, long before Costantine's Conversion to Christianity ⁹⁶, the Roman Emperor is seen as being ready to embrace Monotheism, to which doctrine therefore the Jewish traditionist, the Rabbi, gradually educates him by sweeping away his natural uncertainties and making him finally convinced ⁹⁷.

The Cult of the Most-High God: Titles and Onomastics

To be a valorous military commander is no longer enough to be *Imperator*, *Princeps*, *Dux*; in other words, the Emperor cannot possess the moral qualities necessary for being a good chief, courage, justice and wisdom, without proving that he is at the same time a religious man. If the Roman Emperors of the Golden Age and later on took upon themselves the responsibility of Religion in such a striking way, that could not happen outside of the predominantly spiritual horizon of the period. The popular idea of Religion changes, or rather it has changed already.

The borderline between *eusebés/eusebèia* and *theosebés/theosebèia* is not as sharp as it seems ⁹⁸. It is true that the group of the first nouns usually refers to "pagan" piety, while the second one is ascribed to people who were maturing in themselves the idea of and the consequent devotion to One Supreme Deity, who, to sum up, were spiritually close to a Monotheistic conception ⁹⁹. But it is just the historical development of the events that reduces such differences. As long as the idea of One Supreme Deity was entirely monopolized by the Jews, a massive boundary-line between their religious views and the other ones was fully justifiable: only "Sympathizers" or "Adherents" to Judaism – in addition to native Jews and

Proselytes, of course - had the right to bear such a honourable title as *theosebés* ¹⁰⁰. But with the rise of Christianity the religious universal pattern begins to move, and variable factors come into play which were not foreseen or foreseeable by anybody: it is not by chance, for example, that just the epithets *eusebés* and *theosebés* (often in a superlative form) in the fifth century C.E. have become a sort of honourable title traditionally borne by Christian bishops or Christian pious men ¹⁰¹, while at the beginnings of the Christian Era (I-III cc.) one almost always finds it in Judaic contexts, even if nobody could be very sure of such Judaizers' sincere piety, and know with certainty whether their spiritual approach to Judaism was due to a real "sympathy" towards that "exotic"

Pag. 13

religion as a whole, or towards a single aspect of it, as it often appears to have been the faith in One Most-High God.

An evident indication of this kind of spiritual attitude comes from the field of Onomastics: the growing use of names such as *Theoctistes*, *Theodorus*, *Theodoulos* by individuals who choose to give to their sons similar names is a clear testimony of that. As Stephen Mitchell rightly stressed, in fact, "the prefix *theo-* should not be understood in a loose sense as referring to any god, but precisely to the highest, the one and only god, whom they revered" ¹⁰². But even more relevant for our purposes is a complementary chain of proper names, whose semantic bulk is represented by the concept of "piety", and whose rendering in Greek is therefore seized by the words *eusèbeia/(theo)sébeia*. We have to do with a linguistic reality which we believe to be quite unparalleled throughout the whole history of Onomastics, because there exists a real "host" – for sure no less than one hundred! - of these names: we limit ourselves to citing just the beginning of this never-ending chain, to suggest the dimensions that such a social-religious phenomenon took, specially in imperial times: *Sàbaos*, *Sàbos*, *Sàbbos*, *Sàbeos*, *Sàbbeos*, *Sabbéos*, *Sabiàn*, *Sabia*, *Sabaò*, *Sabà*, *Sàbeis*, *Sàbbeis*, *Sàbis*, *Saibéos*, *Sabbé*, *Sabe*, *Sabés*, *Sabé*, *Sabès*, *Sabaìos*, *Sabbaìos* ... ¹⁰³. If, moreover, one considers that each noun could be connected with several prefixes such as *theo-* and *eu-* ¹⁰⁴, and that the place of the first letter, *sigma*, could be occupied by a *zeta* or even by a *tau-zeta* ¹⁰⁵ (which Greek letters are a common alphabetical transcription of the Semitic alphabets' emphatic sibilant) ¹⁰⁶, one can easily imagine how huge the number of the possible compounds might be!

The problem is that sometimes the true nature of these names is, in our opinion, misunderstood by scholars as a consequence of the ... "Indoeuropean Mirage" once again! A brief survey of Greco-Syrian epigraphic findings is enough to become aware of that: here, in fact, very often the proper name *Sàbaos* recurs which, according to the scientific dominant opinion, should be the written rendering in Greek of the Arabian name *Sabah* (hypokoristikos *Shubayh*) ¹⁰⁷. Against such a linguistic correspondence, two important factors play a crucial role yet: 1) a very meagre presence, indeed, of the name *Sabah* throughout the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* ¹⁰⁸, which by no means justifies a similar "host" of these names in Greco-Syrian epigraphy; 2) the interpretation of the name given by different scholars, who do not agree with each other and who consequently make one think that the alleged correspondence *Sàbaos-Sabah* is real only in a small number of cases ¹⁰⁹.

To sum up, we believe that *Sàbaos* (and most of the names with similar spellings in Greek writing) is nothing else than one of the several forms of the common Hebrew anthroponim *Sambathios* (“*Sabbath* observant”), to which subject Tchrikower dedicated a classical study ¹¹⁰: both the hypokoristikon *Sabbàs*, *Sambàs*, already recorded by Tchrikower ¹¹¹, and the Hebraic expression *Shabbos goy*, pointing at the “stranger” able to carry out the activities forbidden to Jews in days of rest ¹¹², seem to prove it sufficiently. It is worth remembering that to give to one’s sons such names shaped by the noun *Sabbath* was fashionable among the Pagans who – as for example Juvenal’s famous father *metuens sabbata* ¹¹³ – sympathized with Judaism, since that was a very impressive aspect for popular imagination ¹¹⁴. But in the meantime we

Pag. 14

cannot rule out that a linguistic intersection of these names with those linked with the *(theo)sèbeia*’s idea, as well as with those other words phonetically close to it which we have observed, had often taken place.

Eusèbeia and Gnòsis

It is difficult to say how much the historical phenomenon of the rise of Christianity contributed to the new popular idea of Religion which becomes stronger and stronger as time passes by ¹¹⁵. Surely for a certain period it increased the confusion, and not only because of the difficulties in distinguishing between Jews and Christians, and thus to recognize Christianity as an autonomous cult by the Roman government and, more in general, by “the others” ¹¹⁶. Actually, as S. Mitchell opportunely pointed out, “the cult of *Theòs Hypsistos* and the monotheistic conceptions of a wide-spread and popular religious culture were the seed-beds into which Jewish and Christian theology could readily be planted. Without them, the transformation of ancient patterns of belief from pagan polytheism to the predominantly monotheistic systems of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would not only have been far less tidy and unidirectional than it was, it might not have occurred at all” ¹¹⁷.

That is one of the reasons why, in our opinion, the concept of “Henotheism” needs today to be considered old-fashioned and out-of-date. It counts for little that the Highest God rules by Himself or with the help of more or less numerous subordinate deities. Piety occupies now a space much larger than before, namely the moral-ethical one; it has become a sort of intellectual affair, a quality whose absence looks like being in open conflict with the concept of evolved civilization in itself. As was to happen in the Islamic world, when Greek philosophy and, more generally, Hellenic culture began to be known and loved by Muslims, for many of whom it was inconceivable that Plato or Aristotle had worked out their doctrines about the Supreme Good or the Primal Cause without being Monotheists ¹¹⁸, in the Roman

world too a Monotheistic trend quite rapidly became the common habit of mind of every educated person. So, if Cicero might still state ... *cognitionem deorum, e qua oritur pietas*, thus maintaining in the foreground the idea of the plurality of gods ¹¹⁹, Seneca had made a crucial and irreversible step forwards by writing a sentence such as *Deum colit qui novit* ¹²⁰. But here, there is also something more than that: one recognizes in fact that a strong link between Religion and Knowledge, *Eusebeia* and *Gnosis* ¹²¹ has come already into existence, a circumstance which bears witness to what we were saying about the cultural framework gaining ground since the II century onwards into Late Antiquity.

Usually, the connection between these two faculties, by stressing mostly the second one, is seen as a distinguishing mark of Hermetism: one finds in the *Corpus Hermeticum* a sentence stating that “Piety is the Knowledge of God” ¹²², or very similar ones. The reason is clear: knowledge is no longer the mind’s contemplation of

Pag. 15

eternal truths; it has become action, technical operation, and therefore it cannot but invest the sphere of Holiness, because it must force all the powers of Nature and Darkness – the will of gods, angels and demons - in order to fulfil what one desires. But establishing such a link had happened long before entering into the Hermetists’ program ¹²³, since for many people it was already a fact of common sense.

That is not to claim that people did not try to defend the originality and the uniqueness of their own religious position: M. Simon for instance had rightly stressed how careful Western Christianity was in selecting the Latin divine attribute for naming the Supreme Height of God in its liturgy. Christians, in fact, were perfectly aware of the danger that their God might be confused with other Highest Deities, and so they paid special attention to that, by wavering for a long time between epithets such as *Summus*, *Altissimus*, *Exuperantissimus* ¹²⁴ etc. in order to make a lexical choice able to state God’s absolute transcendence without being at the meantime ambiguous for the believers ¹²⁵. Indeed Christianity, as we shall see better later on, did run a risk of confusion with other religious groups whose principal feature was the common faith in One Most-High Deity, even if such a phenomenon was probably limited to certain geographical areas and to certain historical periods ¹²⁶. Here, we wish to record just one example in this sense, because of its connections with our main theme which – as far as we know – nobody till now had ever noticed.

Vincentius’ tomb

Vincentius’ tomb in Rome has been studied at length by archaeologists since its discovery in 1856 in the site of Praetextatus’ Catacombs ¹²⁷: we are dealing with a funerary chamber housing the graves of Vincentius and his wife Vibia, whose walls are painted with frescos illustrating Vibia’s journey down to the Underworld. From the first, the place of the tomb created a big problem: though its owner was

undoubtedly a Sabazios priest, it shares its space with a Christian cemetery, so that it seems to be a part of such a funerary complex ¹²⁸. One of the most diligent scholars who searched into the real nature of the monument, the Italian archaeologist Father Guarducci, engaged himself in defending at any cost the exact localization where, according to him, the tomb should have been, by arguing that, in spite of all appearances, it lay certainly outside the Christian complex ¹²⁹. We do not follow Guarducci in his learned and complicated analysis of the underground labyrinth of this cemetery, since we are not interested in knowing whether he is right or not ¹³⁰, even if it seems to us that his arguments leave much to be desired anyway ¹³¹. What is really interesting, we believe, is that discussions about such a problem should have arisen, because such a fact itself demonstrates that an ambiguity historically exists.

Without paying undue attention to some religious connections made in a syncretistic key by Cumont long time ago (1897) ¹³², for which he was bitterly criticized ¹³³, we may remember here what the great scholar wrote, taking as a starting

Pag. 16

point the famous text of the Latin historian Valerius Maximus about the Jews' expulsion from Rome by praetor Cornelius Hispanus in 139 B.C.E. (*Iudaeos, qui Sabazi Jovis cultu Romanos inficere mores conati erant, repetere domos suas coegit*) ¹³⁴: "La mention étrange du Jupiter Sabazius dans ce texte a généralement été expliquée par une confusion avec le Iahvé Zebaoth, le Dieu des armées, de la Bible. Cette confusion, fondée sur une assonance fortuite, paraît certaine, mais elle n'est pas due, comme on semble le croire, à une simple erreur des Romains. Dans les *Symposiakà problèmata* de Plutarque, un des convives démontre doctement que le Dieu des Juives n'est autre que Dyonisos-Sabazios. Tacite connaît aussi cette assimilation et croit devoir expressément la repousser. Enfin Jean Lydus, dans un passage où il résume sans doute Cornélius Labéon, nous affirme que Dyonisos, Sabazios et *Sabaòth* sont des synonymes" ¹³⁵.

In order to give an answer to some fundamental questions about the Sabians, including the correct etymology of the name itself, assonance is in fact not less important than "real" linguistic relationships, because it counts for much what people sought to recognize in certain words, mostly when they were of foreign origin ¹³⁶. Also, then, a wrong etymology such as that reckoned by some classical scholar in relation to the names of two ancient Italic populations such as the *Sabini* and the *Sabelli* - the alleged root of which should be, according to them, the Greek participial form that we already know (*oi*) *sebòmenoi* ¹³⁷, and whose true roots are, on the contrary, once again Accadian ones meaning respectively "people in close proximity, in the neighbourhoods" (*sàb-in-itì*) and "people in high position, in elevated place" (*sàb- elu*) ¹³⁸ - is an evidence which helps the student to understand what people had at that time in their minds, even if here we only have to do with learned men or at least with people speaking Greek.

Let us return to Vincentius and his wife's underground funerary chamber. We have observed that it is not impossible for a priest of Sabazios to be buried in a Christian cemetery, probably because this god was popularly seen as not so different from the Father God worshipped by Christians: in spite of what is generally admitted by scholars, for instance, we find it difficult to rule out any close relationship

between the bronze votive hands (representing the god's hand blessing his believers)¹³⁹ and a well-known Christian gesture as the *benedictio latina*¹⁴⁰. Indeed, though research concerning this subject has recently made great progress, there is quite a lot to investigate about Sabazios, its origins and its nature¹⁴¹, because even its name still keeps many secrets and shadows: for the moment, we will limit ourselves to saying that, by recognizing for the first time in the noun *saboi* (which recurs among the words cried out by Sabazios' believers during the dancing processions in honour of him [*euoi saboi ues Attes*]¹⁴³, according to Demosthenes' grotesque tale) the presence of the already quoted Accadian noun *sàbu* ("people, population, army, servants"), a pioneer such as Semerano has opened a way which may be very far reaching¹⁴², though Chwolson had hastened to exclude this evidence, along with many other elements¹⁴⁴.

Looking at the walls of the cellar, one soon notices, among the figures which Vibia meets in her journey after-death, two singular characters who cannot but attract our attention: Mercurius¹⁴⁵, who escorts her to Pluto's (*Dis Pater*) transmundane court

Pag. 17

of justice, and a Good Angel (*Angelus Bonus*)¹⁴⁶, who introduces her to seven "happy" guests (*bonorum iudicio iudicati*) taking part in a banquet¹⁴⁷. Is it a simple coincidence to find here some traditional figures of an Hermetic environment such as Hermes/Mercurius and Agathodaimon/Angelus Bonus, which all textual sources universally point to as being the two greatest Harranian prophets?¹⁴⁸

But, provided that our basic hypothesis is correct, we have more. The words composing Vincentius' epitaph again attract our attention, since they are: *Numinis antistes Sabazis Vincentius hic est qui sacra sancta Deum mente pia coluit*. Well, if the last words have a technical sense, if, consequently, the sentence *colere Deum mente pia* defines a special class of believers, namely people close to a Monotheistic religious view as the equivalent Greek expressions *sèbein/sèbesthai tòn theòn* clearly do, and if, finally, the central meaning of Arabic *Sàbi'ùn* is precisely "mid-Converts"¹⁴⁹, or rather "people turning themselves towards the *Theos Hypsistos*' cult", because of the heavy, massive influence of the semantic bulk carried on by such Greek verbs and by the parallel Greek nouns (*sebòmenos/oi tòn theòn, theosebès/èis*: we leave aside the corresponding Latin ones), we have found here a significant set of religious connections with Harràn and the Harranian Sabians which, we believe, deserves further investigation.

Tertium Genus

We are now going to face a crucial point, by analysing a series of names such as Gentiles, *Ethnoi*, *Hèllenes*, Greeks, *Hunafà'* (sing. *Hanif*). Suffice it to recall here that the last one – or rather the parallel noun in Syriac: *Hanpè* (sing.: *Hanpà*)¹⁵⁰ - is

usually employed into Syriac-Christian literature to translate the Greek nouns *Ethnoi*, *Ethnikòi*, *Hellenes*, and it is consequently assumed as an equivalent for “Pagan”¹⁵¹, though the same Arabic term *Hanif* in Islamic usage is considered on the contrary as a close synonym for “Muslim”: in Muhammad’s mind, the name *Hanif* defines in fact a sort of primary Monotheist, in particular the religious position of Abraham who “was not a Jew, nor was he a Christian, but he was a *Hanif*, a Muslim, and not of the Polytheists”, according to the *Sura III*’s famous verse¹⁵².

We have to confess that we have never understood the bitter opposition to the semantic correspondence between the names *Hanif/Hunafà’* and *Sàbi/Sàbi’ùn*, proposed long ago by Pedersen¹⁵³, which scholars have generally maintained¹⁵⁴. It is sufficient to read the titles of the Sabian Thàbit ibn Qurra’s works to realise that they can be exchanged without difficulties: it is true that, in three cases out of four, we find *Hanpè* and just in one *Sàbhàyè*¹⁵⁵, but the fact is very probably due to the relatively recent decision to assume the name *Sàbi’ùn* by the Harranian people at that time (Thàbit dies in 901 C.E.), the sole aspect of *Fihrist*’s story about the meeting between Caliph al-Ma’mùn and Harranians in 823 C.E.¹⁵⁶ which we find convincing and which we therefore subscribe to without reserve¹⁵⁷.

Pag. 18

On the other hand, throughout the passionate harangue in defence of his own and his coreligionists’ position (whose text, as in the case of the works’ titles in Syriac, was literally handed down to us by Barhaebreus’ *Chronography*), Thàbit ibn Qurra denotes all of them – believers in a religion which, in his opinion, is the most ancient and the noblest one – by the Syriac term *Hanpè* once again, while for defining the religion itself he uses the abstract noun *Hanpùtà*¹⁵⁸. It is not difficult to understand that he does not mean by similar expressions what we usually do by saying “Pagans” or “Gentiles” on one side, and “Paganism” or “Gentilism” on the other, though at first sight it seems that there is no lexical alternative¹⁵⁹: the best thing would be not to translate these words at all, as Hjarpe - when rendering the whole text in French - rightly did¹⁶⁰, but the problem still remains anyway.

It seems convenient to recall here an apparently odd opinion of Roger Bacon, who, in spite of his competence in Arabian-Islamic civilization, was in no doubt when qualifying Thàbit, namely the most important exponent of the Sabian-Harranian culture, as “the greatest philosopher among all *the Christians*”¹⁶¹; likewise, when speaking about the religious conflict that arose at a certain moment between Thàbit and his fellow-citizens, the great orientalist Gustav Flugel did not hesitate many centuries later (in his *Dissertatio de arabicis scriptorum graecorum interpretibus*, 1841) to state that Thàbit *a coetu et societate Christianorum remotus et exclusus est*¹⁶².

It would seem quite obvious to think that a simple mistake had been made by both scholars: but how could it happen and, above all, why? We have to do with two very learned men, and with a philosopher, a scientist, a religious leader of first magnitude: how is it possible to give such information, if it is completely wrong? Instead might it not be interesting to think that there were serious historical reasons for consciously exchanging “Sabians” with “Christians”, namely that a similar

confusion had really happened because people often were not able to distinguishing from the other? ¹⁶³

As a matter of fact, nobody till now had been able to explain completely the ways in which the name *Hanif* came to assume in the *Qur'ân* an opposite meaning to the parallel term in the Syriac-Christian lexicon, where it has a wholly negative connotation ¹⁶⁴. We go slightly forward nevertheless, by noting that such a semantic value is not carried by the word itself, since it has been used in that way only under certain historical conditions, namely according to a precise religious point of view. As Faris and Glidden had demonstrated once and for all, by analysing diachronically the word's usage in different inter-linguistic and inter-cultural contexts, the basic meaning of Syriac *Hanpà* is "Hellenist", "Greek", "of Hellenistic education" ¹⁶⁵: so everything depends on the religious meaning which one gives to these expressions. They may mean "Pagan", just as they may not: certainly, they do not include the meaning of "Pagan" if by this word one wants to define a simple "Heathen", an uncivilized "Idolater", a "Peasant" continuing to worship age-old idols ¹⁶⁶. That is the central point.

In our *I Sebòmenoi*, we had suggested a puzzling connection between the Koranic verses mentioning the Sabians and the *Apology's* excerpt where Aristide – as well as some other Holy Fathers of the IV century - express the well-known argument of the rise of Christianity in terms of *Tertium Genus* ¹⁶⁷. It is worth-while remembering

Pag. 19

M. Simon's comments on this subject: "Dès lors que l'Eglise victorieuse étend ses conquêtes jusqu'aux limites du monde civilisé et tend à se confondre avec lui, elle en revendique l'héritage; et lorsque les Pères du IV^e siècle répondent aux Juifs, ils parlent non plus simplement en chrétiens, mais au nom des gens du dehors, appelés à remplacer Israel: *Ecclesia ex gentibus*" ¹⁶⁸. It is this superimposition of the Church on the Hellenic civilization which created a historical confusion difficult to clear up ¹⁶⁹. On one hand, after having won the long struggle of claiming its right of existence, Christianity receives Hellad's inheritance, because Hellenic culture was the previous civilisation while now the civilization is the Church itself; on the other hand, the word "Hellenes" was keeping, in certain contexts such as the Syriac one already observed, its natural meaning of an ethnical group completely indifferent, if not hostile and opposed, to the Church ¹⁷⁰: it is the old Greece's mythical world which survives in the collective imagination with its anthropomorphic deities, with its capricious gods, with its up to date fantastic figures. But such a world exists only as a landscape of the past, so that it easily disappears into the big and undifferentiated mass of barbarous polytheists.

This fact may explain why, in the Greek version of Aristide's *Apology*, the "Greeks" completely vanish: *Trià gène eisìn en tòde tò kòsmo, òn eisì oi par' umìn legomènon theòn proskynetai kai Ioudaioi kai Khristianoi* ¹⁷¹. The "Greeks", as it were, split themselves in two parts, both having become invisible: the "good Greeks", masters of knowledge and eternal symbols of developed civilization, have been suddenly included into the Christian community; the "bad Greeks", the naives and fierce polytheists of the past, have on the other hand been included into the group of the unbelievers ¹⁷². The situation changes in the Syriac version, where one comes

nearer to Muhammad's pattern of world religions, since one reads: "This is evident to you, king, that human races are *four*: Barbarians and Greeks, Jews and Christians" ¹⁷³. Actually, one might have found an exactly corresponding prototype of the Koranic text, if the "Greeks" had been part here – as it is the case for the Sabians in the *Qur'ân* – of the set of the believers (the "People of the Book"), but it is not so: the Syriac excerpt of the *Apology* displays a sketch-map of the historical progress of Religion, by means of the significant equation Religions-Peoples which from this date becomes very common ¹⁷⁴, but these four groups are sharply divided into two halves, the comma leaves no doubt: into the latter the Monotheists are placed, the Jews and the "Third New People", the Christians; into the former, as a whole, Idolaters (Barbarians) and Polytheists, namely the "bad Greeks" observed above, where such a presence is a natural issue of what has been said before about the ecclesiastical negative connotation of the term *Hanpè*.

En passant, a phenomenon of extreme gravity had happened: the historical removal of a so-called "third" group of "Greeks", a huge multitude of persons whose numerical volume was, as we said, surely not smaller in Late Antiquity than that of the Judaic community or of the Christian one: the Pagan Monotheists, the God-Fearers/Worshippers ¹⁷⁵. Christian engagement in order to sweep away this uneasy religious reality goes on for centuries, since any trace of its existence must be totally erased, even if some strongholds of the opposite field continue to offer resistance to the knives. Harràn is one of the most striking examples of that: Harrànians, in fact,

Pag. 20

were normally identified with the "Greeks", even long before the city became an active centre for the translation of Greek scientific and philosophical texts into Syriac and Arabic, for which learned work it has to be viewed, in addition to its other relevant features, as one of the most important world channels for the transmission of the Hellenic culture to the West during the Middle Ages ¹⁷⁶. In Calcedon Council's time, the city was already known as *Hellenopolis* or *Hellènon Polis*, to be understood as "City of the Pagans" indeed (as the Latin version of the same Council's *Acts* explicitly states: *Paganorum civitatis*) ¹⁷⁷, because of its strong conservative spirit in religious matters and its solid links with Greek-Hellenistic education ¹⁷⁸. Also Arabs continue to perpetuate such a portrait of the Harrànians, by seeing them as the Greek civilization's heirs or merely as the Greeks themselves: the philo-Hellenic Purity's Brethren, for instance, declare: "...Greeks ...have got by (today's) people different names, among which Sabians (*Sàbi'ùn*), Harrànians and *Hatùfùn* (*Hanifùn* ?) ¹⁷⁹"; while al-Birùni's *Chronology*, one of the most extensive and interesting sources about Medieval Harràn and its Sabian inhabitants, witnesses what follows: "The Harrànians ... are the remains of the followers of the ancient religion of the West, separated (cut off) from it, since the Ionian Greeks (*i.e.* the ancient Greeks, not the *Romaìoi* or Byzantine Greeks) adopted Christianity" ¹⁸⁰.

Some scholars such as A. Sprenger, C.C. Torrey and C.S. Lyall connected the Arabic term *Hanif* with Hebrew *Hànef*, usually translated "heretic" or also "profane", rather than with the Syriac *Hanpà* ¹⁸¹: indeed, even in Hebrew the semantic value is somewhat ambiguous, if the common opinion according to which the same "Enoch was a *Hànef*, sometimes righteous (*saddìq*), sometimes wicked" ¹⁸² carries any weight.

On the other hand, Medieval Muslim lexicographers, and also some orientalists, insisted on the Arabic origin of the name ¹⁸³, by seeing it as a derivation from the Arabic verb *hanafa*, “to decline, to turn away from” and consequently assigning it the meaning of “one who turns aside or secedes from his community in the matter of religion” ¹⁸⁴; while Father Lammens on his side pointed out to the close connections among the Arabic verbs (V form) *tahannafa*, *tahannata* and *ta'allaha* (the last verb being - incidentally - the final expression of the saying carved upon the door of the *majma'* of the Harranian Sabians still at the beginnings of the IV H./X century C.E. according to al-Ma'sudi: we will return to that) ¹⁸⁵ in relation with “les formes diverses de l'ascétisme chez les anciens Arabes” ¹⁸⁶.

In reality, we seem to remain always in the same semantic field, with the immanent dialectics Good-Evil already observed when discussing the Hebrew root *SHUBH*: everything depends on one's point of view ¹⁸⁷. But *Hanif* is strictly associated with the Muslim concept of *fitra*, the “natural disposition”, and may be connected therefore with the primary constitution of mankind: “Set thy face then, *hanif*-fashion towards the goal (*din*) God hath disposed within the nature of man (or according to the constitution God hath constituted man), for no change can be effected in the creation of God” ¹⁸⁸. Leaving aside the Koranic usage of the term, we shall look briefly at the main features of those ascetics seeking God ¹⁸⁹ about whom several Arab sources provide evidence. They are not Jews nor Christians, because they are said to follow the *millat Ibrahim*, the “way of Abraham”, and in Abraham's times these cults did not exist yet ¹⁹⁰. It is, however, quite strange that, when they come in

Pag. 21

contact with a Christian country and dwell there for a certain time, it is not unusual for them to convert to Christianity: three out of four *Hunafà'* recorded by Ibn Ishàq in the *Sira* ¹⁹¹, became Christians, Ubayd Allàh ibn Jahsh in Abyssinia and Uthmàn ibn Huwayrith at Constantinople, only Waraqa ibn Nawfal (the cousin of Muhammad's wife Khadija) remaining in the region of Hijàz'; the fourth also, Zayd ibn Amr, travelled abroad, through Syria and Mesopotamia, in quest of the true religion but, unlike the others, he did not find what he was looking for: anyway, “he abandoned the worship of idols, abstained from eating that which had died of itself, and from blood, and from things sacrificed to idols, and forbade the burying alive of infants. He proclaimed that he worshipped the Lord of Abraham” ¹⁹².

Sabians = Adherents of the Prevailing Religion

What does one learn from these stories? At least two things. The first would seem to corroborate an exceptionally fitting definition of the Sabians by al-Biruni to which we shall turn at once: exceptional because it is unique for its exactness and clearness, and also because the great Persian polygraph shows that he is able to improve a

definition of the “real Sabians”, given by him within his *Chronology* almost thirty years before, which in our previous study we found already very interesting and suggestive. Actually we have to do with two passages, that are respectively contained in chapter VIII and chapter XVIII of the book, but their remarkable similarity allows us to quote here only the first text: it is worth noting, however, that the writer felt the need to repeat twice what he had come to know on the subject, because this detail suggests that he was perfectly aware of the special importance of such an explanation of the historical rising of Sabianism. He writes: “The Sabians are the remnant of the Jewish tribes who remained in Babylonia, when the other tribes left it for Jerusalem in the days of Cyrus and Artaxerxes. Those remaining tribes felt themselves attracted to the rites of the Magians, and so they *inclined* (were *inclined*, *i.e.* Sàbi) towards the religion of Nebukadnezar, and adopted a system mixed of Magism and Judaism like that of Samaritans in Syria”¹⁹³.

Well, we perceived that a similar version of the facts suddenly opened a window on the truth: what more could one desire than this? It was the extremely plain description of the phenomenon of Proselytism in relation to the Jewish people¹⁹⁴, of its first chronological manifestation ...^{194 bis}; or rather it was in this sense that we were tempted to interpret the excerpt: it seemed in fact to confirm on the whole our hypothesis about the equation Sabians–God-Fearers, by laying the foundation stone of the theoretical building. Though pointing to the same direction, however, the *Chronology*’s text says literally something slightly different, but in order to understand what such a thing would be we have to look at al-Bìrùnì’s complementary definition of the Sabians which we started from, the one contained in his *Kitàb al-tafhìm*, the *Book of Initiation in the Elements of the Art of Astrology*.

Pag. 22

Here, in the relevant section dealing with the “Horoscope of Religions”¹⁹⁵, where the seven planets are put in correspondence with just as many universal religions, one finds the Moon - namely the lowest of the seven heavenly bodies, naturally associated with Harràn because of the Sumero-Babylonian cult of the Moon-God *Sìn* whose worship was still alive in this ancient city, proud of its religious traditions, during the Muslim Middle Ages¹⁹⁶ – placed in parallel with the Sabians, just as one might have expected. But really surprising is the formula by which al-Bìrùnì delimits Sabianism, since Sabians become now the “Adherents of the Prevailing Religion” (*alladhina bi-dìn kulli gàlibin*)¹⁹⁷. Perfectly fitting! Impeccable! It is impossible to define in a better way the idea of what has been called, to use an infelicitous expression indeed, “mid-Conversion”¹⁹⁸. A general but not generic formula, where among many other things one recognizes also the devotional position of the four *Hunafà*’ whom we have met above: to make Conversion a well-identified phenomenon, one needs not only a private spiritual feeling enlarged to massive dimensions, but also a dominant religion, namely a cult able to have a prevalent position over the others. In any case, that was how the process developed in the course of history: only when a single religion, Christianity, became the official Religion of the Roman Empire, in fact, did Conversion begin to be acknowledged as a clear, unquestionable fact, representing a social and religious reality that people

could eventually conceive without difficulties and therefore express without linguistic ambiguities.

Hypsistarii, Sebòmenoi/Phobòmenoi (tòn Theòn), Theosebeis, Massaliani, Euphemitai, Caelicolae, Hunafà'

“Adherents of the Prevailing Religion”: let us pay attention to the first term. “Adherents” simply means “Symphatizers”¹⁹⁹, “Close to”, “To get ready for”, it does not mean “Full Converts”, which is exactly the case of the God-Fearers. Probably al-Birùnì should have added to the last words of his definition the attribute “Monotheistic”, since we always have to do with people who made the fundamental step to turn themselves to the faith in One Most-High God, in One Supreme Deity²⁰⁰ in reference to whom the other lesser deities play often the role of heavenly messengers, of angels, as the Oracle from Oenoanda – that is from the Northern Lycian site where one of the rare *Hypsistarii*’s cult-places has been found – explicitly states by Apollo’s mouth: “Born of itself, untaught, without a mother, unshakeable, not contained in a name, known by many names, dwelling in fire, this is God. We, his angels, are a small part of God”²⁰¹. But it is true, also, that after the final victory of Christianity God-Fearers’ communities – whose names historically range from *Hypsistarii, Hypsistariani*, to *Theosebeis, Sebòmenoi tòn Theòn, Caelicolae* etc. - but also the lonely individuals seeking after God known by the name *Hunafà'* in the Near

Pag. 23

Eastern desert regions felt the attraction of Christianity by often achieving their spiritual way through a full Conversion to the Cross, while in previous times they were gravitating around the prevalent Monotheistic groups settled throughout the geographical areas where they lived, which as a rule were Jewish ones.

Al-Birùnì’s first-quoted text also turns the reader’s thought to the Jewish context, even if the Persian writer seems to believe that the Jewish presence along the Euphrates and Tigris valley is connected to a religious reality that will come along after several centuries, namely the migration from Palestine into Southern Mesopotamia of some Hemerobaptist sects as Elkesaits and Mandaeans²⁰². But if one interprets the information by means of al-Birùnì’s second excerpt, one sees rather the real influence that Zoroastrianism had on Hebraic religion, because it was precisely during the “Babylonian captivity” that some typical features of Hebraism such as the juxtaposition Good-Evil and God-Satan or concepts such as the Last Judgement and the Resurrection of the Dead came into being²⁰³. To sum up, we have supposed that al-Birùnì’s first text was only to be connected with such a historical phenomenon; on the other hand, it had relations with the historical rising of Jewish Proselytism, and reminded for example a well-known textual passage by Josephus mentioning the transfer of the Jews from Babylon to Asia Minor by Antiochus III at the end of the III century B.C.E.²⁰⁴: it was from this original bulk that many well-organized Jewish

communities spread throughout Asia Minor and elsewhere, exerting a strong spiritual attraction on the surrounding Gentile milieu, as archaeological findings have proved with certainty. In Afrodisia ²⁰⁵, in particular, Gentiles' involvement in the local synagogue appears to have been really massive, since more than half of the people attending the cult-place were Gentiles whose status range across the entire social spectrum, from the highest civic positions and liberal professions to craftsmen and simple workers ²⁰⁶: it is worth noting, once again, that such people were not full-converts, but plain *theosebeis*, God-Fearers, whereas only three individuals are recorded in the engraved inscription mentioning the donors' names of the beneficent institution which they contribute to as *proselytoi* ²⁰⁷, namely people legally converted to Judaism ²⁰⁸. Probably the Roman laws prohibiting circumcision and conversion to Judaism since Hadrian's times played a significant role in such a meagre number of persons claiming explicitly that "passing of the boundary" which Juvenal so greatly feared and bitterly mocked: here, in fact, most of the no-Jews prefer to remain in the more neutral religious position of Juvenal's *pater metuens sabbata*, worshipping *nubes et caeli numen* and abstaining from *carne suillam* rather than that of the son who decides to make the last step and thus *mox et praeputia ponit* without any reserve ²⁰⁹.

Beyond such vague elements, we know very little about the God-Fearers' cultic practices. From Oenoanda's text one learns that sometimes their cult had solar features, because of the Oracle's prescription to the faithful to pray in direction of the rising sun, namely facing east, gazing up at heaven and offering prayers to the all-seeing Aether ²¹⁰. A tendency to solar Monotheism comes also out from J. Ustinova's speculations about the Iranian background of the religious position of the *thiasoi*, the cultic associations – called *eispoietoì adelphoì sebòmenoi theòn hypsiston*, but also *synodos* of *thiaseitai* or *thiasòtai* – worshipping *Theòs Hypsistos* in Tanais and in

Pag. 24

several other Greek colonies on the Northern shore of the Black Sea in the first half of the II c. C.E. ²¹¹, though we reject her general conclusions ²¹². We should not dwell here on the connection established by E. Schurer more than one century ago between these groups of Monotheistic or quasi-Monotheistic believers and the *metuentes* attested by epigraphic and literal evidence in the Latin West ²¹³, but above all with the *sebòmenoi* (*tòn theòn*), the *phoboùmenoi* (*tòn theòn*), the *Hellenes* whom Saint Paul regularly meets in the course of his indefatigable mission ²¹⁴ in the synagogues of Asia Minor and Greece where he preaches the evangelical message (but in other meeting-places also, mostly after Paul's last theological break with the Jews ²¹⁵: "Thus I shall go to Gentiles") ²¹⁶, and who consequently appear to be the original bulk of the emerging Christianity according to Luke's *Acts*.

For the cultic features of the Western *metuentes*, what we have observed in Juvenal's satirical verses ²¹⁷ is perhaps enough; in reference to God-Fearers' practices in *Acts* one must rather stress the crucial decision of Jerusalem's Council (51 C.E.) ²¹⁸, where the duties of such Gentile Converts to Christianity were fixed once and for all: "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood" ²¹⁹. What is that? It is just the moral-religious code which, according to rabbinical tradition, every

man is obliged to follow, and in particular the stranger, the “resident alien” (*ger toshàb, ger ash-sha’ar*) in the State of Israel ²²⁰: the so-called “Noachite Laws” ²²¹. There exist various versions of such prescriptions ²²², but it is interesting to notice now that after this historical decision Christians Converts coming from Gentilism, namely uncircumcised Christians (*Ecclesia ex Gentibus*) ²²³, God-Fearers, at least the *sebòmenoi/phoboùmenoi (tòn theòn)/Hellenes* contacted by Paul and other apostles, *Hunafà’*, at least the *Hanif* Zayd whose devotional practices are the only ones to be explicitly stated in the *Sira* ²²⁴, Sabians, whom many traditions consider as Noah’s heirs and consequently followers of the “Noachite Laws” ²²⁵, and finally Harranians, whose capital city is said to have been founded by Noah or by some of his relatives (a son or a nephew) after the Flood ²²⁶, appear to share to some extent the same ethical-religious duties.

But let us go on checking the available textual evidence about God-Fearers’ beliefs and rites. What Gregory of Nazianzus witnesses about the Cappadocian group called by him *Hypsistarii* is quite interesting, since he is speaking about his own father, converted to Christianity by some bishops *en route* to the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.), thus handing down a direct and personal experience: “The Cult was a mixture of two elements, Hellenic error and adherence to the Jewish law ... Its followers reject the idols and sacrifices of the former and worship fire and lamplight; they revere the *sabbath* and do not touch certain foods, but have nothing to do with circumcision. To the humble they are called Hypsistarians, and the *Pantokrator* is the only god they worship” ²²⁷.

There may be little doubt about the relations between this group of devotees of the Highest Divinity and the “enigmatic” ²²⁸ community of worshippers of the god *Sabbatistés* mentioned in a Cilician inscription dating back to Augustus’ time and elsewhere called *etairéa tòn Sambati/stòn* ²²⁹. The members of such a cultic

Pag. 25

association, denoting themselves by the term *etaïroi*, surely revered the *Sabbath*, even if they could not be native Jews nor proselytes: as Tcherikover rightly pointed out, in fact, Jews would never refer to their God as “the God of the *Sabbath*” ²³⁰. We are, therefore, dealing with a Gentile environment, namely with observers of the Jewish “Seventh Day” of rest whose Hellenistic organization appears to be similar to that of the other groups of pagan believers in a Transcendental Deity.

A passage from Gregory of Nyssa’s *Contra Eunomium* is another classical source about *Hypsistiani*: that is the name, indeed very similar to the previous one recorded by the other Gregory, by which he denotes the members of this Monotheistic group, but without adding any relevant information except for the acknowledgement of attributes such as “the highest” and *Pantokrator* given to God by them and, at the same time, their rejection of a Christian attribute such as “Father” in reference to God

²³¹.

The testimony of Epiphanius about *Messalians* (“Those who pray”), even called *Euphemitai* (“Those who bless”), happens during the same period (376 C.E.) and is contained in his *Panarion* where the subject is discussed at length. The Cyprian bishop distinguishes between a Christian sect by this name and the “Pagan” community ²³², for both of which he shows very little sympathy indeed, but we are for

the moment only interested to record what the famous heresiologist knows about the latter: “They are simply pagans who admit the existence of gods but worship none among them; they adore one God only, whom they call Almighty. They also construct for themselves certain houses or spacious areas, like *fora*, which they call *proseuchai*. Of old there were certain places of prayer among the Jews which were outside the city, and among the Samaritans, as we find as well in the *Acts of the Apostles*, where Lydia, a seller of purple goods, met those with Paul ... Now these earlier Messalians, who derive themselves from pagans and who appeared on the scene before those at present who derive from the Christian religion, have themselves constructed on the one hand certain small places in certain regions which are called *proseuchai* or *eukteria*, while in other locations they have built for themselves something like churches, where they gather at evening and morning with much lighting of lamps and torches and lengthy singing hymns and acclamations to God by the zealous among them, through which hymns and acclamations they fondly think to conciliate God”²³³.

One changes geographical area with Cyril of Alexandria, whose information is worthy of attention mostly because of the name of the group that he mentions, for it recurs again under the form of *Theosebeis*, which we have already encountered. They live in Phoenicia and Palestina, worship *Hypsistos Theos* but also other deities such as the Sun and the Moon, Earth and Heaven, and the brightest stars: just as was the case for Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Hypsistarii*, also Cyril claims that *Theosebeis*’ beliefs and ritual customs are neither Jewish or Christian, but are a sort of mixture of both²³⁴.

In Northern Africa, finally, one finds a group known by the name *Caelicolae* in the first years of the V century, because it is mentioned in two constitutions of the *Theodosian Code* (408 and 409 C.E.)²³⁵: these *Caelicolae* - whose *maior* seducing many Christians into a sacrilegious second baptism also Saint Augustine is shown to have been in contact with²³⁶ - are charged with being a heretical Judaizing sect and are consequently outlawed by the emperors Honorius and Arcadius, even if it is not

Pag. 26

clear whether such legal measures were ever successful²³⁷. Yet it is specially important for our purposes that the same name is used twice in *Beza* Latin translation of *Acts*: since the word is used to render the Greek term *sebomēnoi*²³⁸, in fact, one can assume with Schurer that their beliefs were quite similar to those of the God-Fearers already attested in Asia Minor and elsewhere²³⁹.

From this brief chronological and geographical survey emerges a real religious frontier, which some authors have also recognized²⁴⁰. For the rituals, it is not possible to go beyond the evidence, so that one must limit oneself to say that, even when organized communities are concerned, God-Fearers’ religious prescriptions were absolutely not rigid ones and thus can be viewed as a rule within the loose horizon included by the “Noachite Laws”²⁴¹. There was probably sometimes a solar aspect in the cult, the weight of which it is not possible to determine precisely in the different communities, and which might also be totally absent. All this explains why - we believe - several Muslim interpreters of the Middle Ages explicitly claim that the Sabians are “a religious group which has no cult, scripture and prophet, admitting only the *tawhīd*, the profession of faith: ‘There is no god but God’ (*Là Allah ill’*

Allah)”²⁴²: a religion which has no cult looks like a paradox, but after what we have learnt about God-Fearers it ceases to appear as such. In the meantime, this evidence – among many other findings - proves that the Mandaean hypothesis about Koranic Sabians is on the wrong road and should consequently be given up.

The Sabians According to First Islamic Sources

During the first two centuries of the Islamic Era, Near Eastern authors do not distinguish between “real” and “false” Sabians: this distinction, in fact, came to the light only in the first half of the III H./IX C.E. c., namely after the Harranians assumed the name “Sabians” to define their religious position in relation to the Baghdad Caliphate, during a period when the inter-religious dialogue was quite intense²⁴³. These scholars seem the better source, therefore, for understanding or at least for coming as near as possible to the very nature of the Sabians mentioned by Muhammad in the *Qur’àn*²⁴⁴: actually one wonders at these interpreters’ honesty of mind, because they generally appear not to fear being too close to the text and adding very poor information to what it literally express. As far as the three Koranic passages recording the *Sàbi’ùn* are concerned, the Holy Text shows the following chains of (universal) religions: Believers (Those who believe, Muslims), the Jews, the Christians, the Sabians (*Sura* II, 62); Believers, the Jews, the Sabians, the Christians (*Sura* V, 69); Believers, Those who are the Jews, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, Unbelievers (Those who set up gods [with God], Pagans of old) (*Sura* XXII, 17).

Well, with great coherence all these sources state that the Sabians are a religious group *between* the Jews and the Christians, or *between* the Jews and the Magians, or

Pag. 27

that they are a Christian sect, or, finally, that they are a separate religion: it is easy to see, therefore, that here the distance from what the text literally says is very limited, or even nonexistent. It is important to remember, besides, the name that defines here the Christians, *i.e.* *al-Nasàra*: since it is true that *al-Nasàra* is the term usually employed in the Muslim World from the beginnings to name the Christians²⁴⁵, but we know that it was not just the only one in use in Muhammad’s times. It is enough to quote the term *ràhib* (pl. *ruhàb*), “monk”, “ascetic”²⁴⁶, but also “philosopher”²⁴⁷, by which Christians were often identified by Arabs and by other people dwelling in Near Eastern desert regions or in the surrounding geographical areas²⁴⁸; or to remember a famous religious community such as *al-Ibàd*, “The Worshippers”, “The Servants (of God)”, *i.e.* the Nestorian Christians living in al-Hira²⁴⁹, in Southern Mesopotamia.

Regarding the Sabians’ beliefs and rites, the following evidence comes out from these sources: 1) They believe in only One God²⁵⁰; 2) They do not have any cult, scripture or prophet²⁵¹; 3) They state they are followers of the prophet Noah²⁵²; 4) They pray to the Sun²⁵³; 5) They pray in the direction²⁵³ of the *qiblah*²⁵⁴; 6) They

worship the angels and read the psalms (*zabùr*)²⁵⁵; 7) They believe in the prophets²⁵⁶; 8) They have 5 daily ritual prayers²⁵⁷; 9) They fast 30 days a year²⁵⁸.

It is clear that there are some contradictions among these statements; it is evident, in other words, that some of these scholars have in mind a certain religious community, a precise one, probably even the Mandaeans or another Baptismal sect, since some of them lived – as they still do nowadays – in the South of Iraq²⁵⁹. But the problem is not to determine whether the Mandaeans may be included among the Sabians and may consequently be part of the “People of the Book”²⁶⁰; the problem is whether these features fit with their religion or not. Now, we think that a statement such as the second one, namely that “they do not have any cult, scripture or prophet”, or that “they do not have a certain canonical law”, or even that “they have no distinctive religion” is a very singular feature. Actually, with the final summary of the beliefs and the rites of the Sabians made by S. Gunduz, the last and resolute exponent of the “Mandaean party”²⁶¹, one cannot appreciate thoroughly the real weight that the above cited definitions have according to these scholars, while they recur very frequently and are particularly stressed by many of them²⁶².

But which religion does not have any cult? Well, we believe that such a singular feature can only be applied to a loose group of believers such as the God-Fearers: moreover, their religious position perfectly fits with many other elements of the evidence collected above, and in particular with the statements: 1) because the faith in One (Most-High) God is the most characteristic God-Fearers’ religious feature; 3) because of their links with Noah which we have observed when discussing the “Noachite Laws”; 4) because of the cult’s solar aspects which we have sometimes noted among God-Fearers’ ritual practices; 5) for the same reason, since the Arabic term *qiblah* defines in general the cosmic centre, not - as Gunduz seems to believe – “the South”, and consequently it may refer to the different positions of the Sun in the sky during the 24 hours cycle (thus including also the North)^{262 bis}, in which direction the faithful probably addressed his prayers to; 6) because of the cult of the angels which, again, we have recognized as being particularly present among the God-Fearers (we leave aside for the moment the problem of *zabùr*). We have no elements

Pag. 28

that help us to decide whether the final three points of our list are congruent with the God-Fearers’ faith: it is worth noting, anyway, that point 8) may be a natural issue of the cult’s solar aspects already mentioned, whereas point 7) may be seen as a consequence of the Biblical tradition, certainly well-known by many of these communities’ members²⁶³; point 9), finally, is reckoned by just one scholar, ‘Abù al-Zanàd, the same person who records that “they believe in the prophets” and that “they have 5 ritual prayers daily” with Ziyàd ibn-Abihì (and, just for the last statement, with Qatàdah).

We think it important to recall here the first authoritative Latin version of the Koran made in Spain by Robert of Ketton and Hermann of Carinzia's staff of translators according to Peter the Venerable's will, in the year 1143 C.E. ²⁶⁴. The expressions chosen by those scholars chose to translate the name Sabians in the three Koranic passages in question are in fact very instructive for our purposes. Let us read, then, the Latin text: *Sciendum autem generaliter, quoniam omnis recte vivens, Iudeus seu Christianus, seu lege sua relicta in aliam tendens, omnis scilicet Deum adorans, bonique gestor, indubitanter divinum amorem assequetur* (II, 62) ²⁶⁵; *Credientes atque Iudaei, et angelos loco Dei adorantes, qui scilicet legem pro lege variant, Christiani etiam, omnes hi inquam si in Deum crediderint, et iudici diem expectantes benefecerint, nihil timeant* (V, 69) ²⁶⁶; *Iam tibi coelitus missa re manifesta, quos vult in viam rectam Deus dirigit: qui super omnia potens, illa die credentium et Iudaeorum, ac leges variantium Christianorum, item et gentilium ac incredulorum iudex atque discussor inter erit* (XXII, 17) ²⁶⁷.

We must not forget that we have to do with a learned translation, which should virtually gather the best sources of information about the Koranic text ²⁶⁸; besides, one can observe that in XII century Spain Islamic civilisation had been deeply rooted for hundreds of years, and it was therefore the best cultural milieu to carry on such a work. On the other hand, as everybody knows, Spain was the main cultural channel through which most of the old Greek works (but Persian, Indian etc. ones also), lost in the West many centuries earlier, were translated indirectly from a "second hand" Arabic version into a Latin one, so that they eventually became available to an European public. Anyway, scholars generally acknowledge that Robert and Hermann have accomplished good work, because the translation ²⁶⁹ is quite literal: it is not by chance, for example, that also the first Italian translation of the *Koran* (1547) is based upon such an original Latin version ²⁷⁰.

But let us begin with the "Sabian" passage of the *Sura* II: it is not difficult to recognize the equation Sabians = God-Fearers, if it is true that the latter are really not full Converts, but just people who have abandoned (at least in part) their previous beliefs and are seeking after (the Latin participial form *tendens* is here perfectly

Pag. 29

fitting) another religion, not without having done in the meantime the fundamental spiritual step of believing in only One Deity, the Most-High God. The background of this information is, likewise, easy to identify: it is one of the most significant semantic values of the Arabic verbs *saba'a* and *sabà* that al-Tabarì and many other interpreters took in order to explain the name *Sàbi*. The word means "someone who takes on a new religion other than his own", the great Koranic commentator states, adding that the term is an equivalent of the noun *murtadd*, "renegade", "apostate" ²⁷¹.

In the "Sabian" passage of the *Sura* V it is perhaps possible to recognize two different keys of interpretation: the expression *qui scilicet lege pro lege variant*, "who in other words change the Law into (for) another one", looks like a detail suggesting – just as the reading of the *zabùr*, the David's *Psalms* which we have met above among the Sabian features ²⁷² – a Christian milieu rather than a Sabian one; but we

shall soon see that such a distinction probably was not always made by external observers, so that one could often exchange one for the other. On the other hand, the sentence *angelos loco Dei adorantes* is quite strange here, because it seems to be evident that the group in question belongs to the wider category of the Believers, the Monotheists: so what reason is there to suspect the act of “worshipping angels instead of God”? We have noticed that angels’ worship is an important feature in the cult of *Theos Hypsistos* by the God-Fearers, mostly in Asia Minor where a lot of inscriptions mentioning angels have been found ²⁷³. Angels play an important role in Jewish religious culture ²⁷⁴, but at least in this region they appear to be a common feature of Jews, Christians and God-Fearers: Saint Paul in fact reproached the Colossians for their custom of worshipping angels, but we must acknowledge that similar admonitions were made in vain, if Theodoret’s commentary on that text does not fail to show that their cult was still alive in Phrighia and Pisidia four centuries later ²⁷⁵. Then, do we have to do with God-Fearers or with (heterodox) Christians here?

The “Sabian” passage in the *Sura XXII* is the most puzzling one: here, in fact, the lack of a comma between *leges variantium* and *Christianorum* obliges the reader to understand the expression as a whole ²⁷⁶; actually, it seems reasonable to look at the Christians in terms of the historical “people” who really changed the (Old Testament) Law ²⁷⁷, even if at this point the group of the Sabians/God-Fearers ceases completely to appear. Perhaps it is not useless, therefore, to insist upon the historical role played by the God-Fearers during the crucial period of the rising of Christianity, at least according to the *Acts*’ version of the facts and to Luke’s witness about the sympathy that the *phobòmenoi/sebòmenoi* (*tòn theòn*) felt while listening to the evangelical message, often converting themselves to Christianity ²⁷⁸.

The historical closeness between the two religious groups also emerges with particular relevance from the evidence collected in S. Pines’ 1968 important article “The Iranian Name for Christians and God-Fearers”. Given the special interest of the subject for our area of research, we quote it at length: “In Pahlavi, Sogdian and New Persian, the meaning of one of the most common designations for Christians is ‘fearers’ (*tarsàkàn*), whereas in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Syriac, similar words, with identical meaning (often, but not always, coupled

Pag. 30

with God’s name), denote the ‘God-Fearers’ (or *Yir’è shamayim*), viz., Gentiles who, in the period before or immediately after the beginning of the Christian Era, believed in the God of the Jews and observed some of their precepts ... In all probability, the designation *tarsàk* is ... a vestige that testify to the fact that, in countries in which Aramaic or an Iranian language was spoken, on the borders of the Persian Empire or within it, the Christians, during a certain historical period, were identified with the ‘God-Fearers’, in the technical sense of the term ... The designation of the Christians by the name *tarsakàn* is, consequently, further proof of the strong connections which existed in the Iranian regions (and in the eastern border-lands of the Roman Empire) between primitive Christianity and the circles of the *sebòmenoi*” ²⁷⁹.

Pines’ study is especially important for two reasons: in fact it corroborates our hypothesis about the presence of God-Fearers along the borders of the Arabian peninsula or in the neighbouring regions in the historical period which we are dealing

with, and it also supposes – as we do – that a confusion between God-Fearers and Christians could sometimes have appeared. Such a confusion was probably due to some similarities in cult practices between both religious groups, as we have already observed, so that in certain geographical areas and during a certain historical period both communities were perhaps called with an identical name by external observers²⁸⁰. If such is the case, passages in the *Koran* about the *Sàbi'ùn* could be interesting historical testimonies of bilingualism, such as that one showed by the famous Middle-Persian Inscription from *Kartir*: here, the simultaneous quotation, among other religious groups, of *nàcaràv* and *kristiyàn*, is explained by M.L. Chaumont, who published and translated the document, in the following way: “Les mots *nàcaràv* et *kristiyàn* se rapporteraient l’une l’autre aux chrétiens orthodoxes sans aucune acception d’hérésie. Leur juxtaposition serait l’effet d’un bilinguisme qui s’était instauré depuis peu au sein de la chrétienté perse ... Il est très frappant que dans les *Acta* de Siméon bar Sabba’è les termes *kristiyanà* et *nasorayè* sont employés comme synonymes. Avec l’inscription de *Kartir*, nous sommes peut-être à l’origine de ce double emploi. Le rédacteur du document, s’il connaissait l’un et l’autre vocable, ne savait sans doute pas qu’ils pouvaient s’appliquer à la même religion”²⁸¹.

A third testimony which we wish to discuss here comes from one of the *Hadith* texts concerning the Arabic root *SB*, with the meaning “changing one’s religion for another”, “to apostatize”, which we already know as a whole. The excerpt comes from to chapter LVIII of al-Bukhàri’s *Sahih*, consecrated to *al-jiziya wa al-mwàda’a ma’a àhl al-dhimma wa al-harb*, namely to the rules which Muslims had to keep when coming in contact with other populations²⁸²: in these cases, the problem was whether to consider these persons as being part of “the People of the Book”, the Monotheistic communities enjoying the right of tolerance (Jews, Christians, Magians and Sabians), in exchange for the payment of a special tax, the *jiziya*, foreseen in these cases by Islamic law. The title of the paragraph which we are dealing with is “About the case when the enemies, after having been won, say: ‘We (want to) become Sabians (*sabà’na, sabà’na*)’, without having been able to say correctly ‘We (want to) become Muslims (*aslamna, aslamna*)’”²⁸³, and it narrates a quite strange story, indeed. While Khàlid in such a situation did not hesitate to slaughter everybody, being criticized

Pag. 31

afterwards by the Prophet who kept a distance from his fierce behaviour, ‘Umar on his side claimed that, when some enemy cried out the (Persian) word *Matras!*²⁸⁴ (“Do not fear!”), he had to be saved.

What is the meaning of this episode? Actually it is not easy to interpret. As often happens when one tries to deepen the meaning of the textual evidence about the Sabians²⁸⁵, the sense of the document is not completely clear in this case either. At first sight it would seem that the word *matras* is a sort of password, providing the external boundaries of the concrete religious goal which the people here at stake are pointing to. After what we have learnt about the Persian name for Christians – *Tarsakàn* - from Pines’ study, in fact, we can be reasonably sure that the individuals in question by pronouncing such a word would roughly intend to embrace the idea of “religious fear”.

But the imperative form of the verb remains still quite problematic: how is it possible for a person vanquished by another to say (to him): “Do not fear!” ? Has there ever been a mistake in the transcription of the verb’s tense ? Everything becomes very much clearer, though, when one takes into account the well-known Old Testament formula ‘*al-tirà* (“do not fear!”), recurring in many different literary and social contexts, among which one in particular deserves our attention being exactly paralleled by the story handed down by al-Bukhàri: the (Holy) War. The general encourages his soldiers to fight precisely by means of the expression “do not fear!”, which on the other hand belongs to the “stereotyped phraseology” of holy war also beyond the borders of the Jewish culture ^{285 bis}.

We are therefore able to state that the commonly accepted translation of the verb *saba’na*, namely “we (want to) become Sabians”, is very probably not the right one, and that it should rather be changed into “we (want to) become God-Fearers”, or “Christians”, as well as plainly “Monotheists”.

Harranians’ Cult of the Most-High God

The last problem which we must discuss is the Harranian religious position. As we have said more than once, the version contained in al-Nadim’s *Fihrist* of the reasons why Harranians chose to assume the name “Sabians” during the first half of the III H./IX C.E. century, seems to us at least partially unbelievable, and we think with Hjarpe that it can be sufficiently explained through the needs of religious controversy ²⁸⁶: the historical source from which al-Nadim takes this information is in fact the Christian Abù Yusùf al-Qathii, namely the author of the “Talking Head”, the horrible story recorded later by the same *Fihrist* ²⁸⁷: no doubt, therefore, about this person’s wish of denigrate the Harranian people and their ritual practices, by shedding on them all the most unfavourable light ²⁸⁸.

Pag. 32

Well, let us look more seriously at the picture. It is not possible that Harranians could have continued to follow their ancient traditions in the open air for centuries if their religious position was not able to be included within a Monotheistic pattern, and if it had been, consequently, in striking contradiction with the surrounding Islamic milieu ²⁸⁹. But we believe, however, that it was absolutely not an affair of corruption, and that it certainly was not just by means of a lot of naive lies and shameful bribes – as the *Fihrist* and other textual sources of the Middle Ages would have the reader believe ²⁹⁰ - that Harràn (a centre which for some years was the Ummayyad Caliphate’s capital city! ²⁹¹) could keep its ancient beliefs and rites alive without undergoing any repression by the dominant Muslim government: on the contrary, as everybody knows, many Harranians enjoyed the Caliphs’ confidence and were held in high esteem because of their philosophical and scientific worth, mostly in the field of astronomy and mathematics’ ²⁹², and it was surely not because of a simple “varnish”

of Monotheism such as the one which the Harranian Sabians would have boasted according to M.J. De Goeje's old opinion ²⁹³.

To demonstrate that the highly sophisticated theology adopted by the Harranian people corresponds to a Monotheistic point of view is an automatic action: the Neoplatonic system which dominates their conception of the *kosmos* ²⁹⁴, with the spiritual Beings living in it and acting as Mediators between Man and God, who dwells beyond all heavenly heights and therefore cannot directly communicate with him, is evident proof of that by itself ²⁹⁵. It is important to stress the expressions by which such a transcendental Deity was named by Harranians, because it makes clear that their religious horizon was perfectly in keeping with the theology of *Theòs Hypsistos* which we have recognized as the most characteristic feature of the God-Fearers' cult. The document which proves beyond any doubt that both contexts share the same faith in One Most-High God is the famous manual of Magic, the *Gayàt al-Hakim (The Aim of the Sage)* ²⁹⁶, better known in its Latin form *Picatrix* ²⁹⁷ under which it was widespread in Europe during the Middle Ages, and which represents moreover one of the best existing sources of information about the Harranian Sabians. Well, in the introductory section of the *Gayà* to the "planetary prayers", where the general prescriptions to be observed before the beginning of the rite are listed, the author urges the faithful to: "First of all fill yourself with fear of God": it is worth noting here that not only one finds out just the "pass-word" which we are expecting, the "Most-High" ²⁹⁸ (God), but also the reference to the spiritual "fear" which we have learnt to be a God-Fearers' typical attitude of mind. The fact that such expressions are not here by chance is demonstrated later on, throughout what we can call the "Monotheistic series" ²⁹⁹ of these astral invocations, because the repetition of a particular formula is required every time that the worshipper addresses himself to a planetary deity to fulfil his own desires: the formula in fact begins with the words: "For the sake of the Lord of the High Building" ³⁰⁰, where the hint to God's Exceeding Highness is explicitly made once again in order to obtain the divine intercession before undertaking any ritual action.

What nobody has ever proved until now – as far as we know – is that also the "popular" religion of Harràn could correspond to a Monotheistic pattern, that is the

Pag 33

crucial move allowing us to set Abù Yusuf al-Qathii's calumnies aside definitively. From this point of view one can adduce in fact Sumatar Harabesi's evidence, where many Syriac inscriptions dating back to 165 C.E. have been found invoking "Sìn, the God", or *Sìn Marilahé*, or, finally, simply *Marilahé* ("The Lord of the Gods") ³⁰¹. The open-air shrine of Sumatar Harabesi lies a few kilometres North-East of Harràn, and there can be no doubt about the close religious relations existing between both places: despite Segal's speculations about the identity of *Marilaha* (that was his reading of the divine name, "The Lord God") with *Baal Shamin*, the "Lord of the Heavens" of the Semitic pantheon, the equation *Marilahé* = Moon-God *Sìn* has been demonstrated with certainty ³⁰²: in Neo-Babylonian times (half of the VI B.C.E. c.), the Moon Deity was addressed in identical terms, "Sìn Lord of the gods" (*Sìn bèl shà ilani*) according to the famous Nabonide's inscription discovered in Harràn ³⁰³, as it happened still in

IV H./X C.E. c. according to an Harranian cultic calendar (*Rabbu 'l'alihati*) handed down once again by al-Nadim³⁰⁴.

If one leaves aside the evidence of Hatra, where some coins with the *legenda SYN MRLH* have been found in 1958³⁰⁵, it would seem that Sumatar inscriptions were the only epigraphic witness of *Marilahé*'s existence. But the 1970 discovery in Palmyra of an engraved block of stone mentioning again the "Lord of the gods" moves changes things. Even if the identity *Sin* = *Marilahé* is problematic in Palmyra, because the Moon-God at the head of the pantheon is not under discussion here³⁰⁶, this evidence suggests, on the other hand, that such a divine attribute in an Aramaic environment is to be considered similar, if not identical, to the Greek expression *Theòs Hypsistos*, so that it becomes specially interesting for us. In the same Palmyrian "Diocletian's Campus", 11 dedications to "the unnamed God" - also invoked in terms of "Lord of the World" and "Lord of the Universe", "autant de dénominations parallèles à celle de 'Seigneur des dieux'" according to M. Gawlikowski who first published the document³⁰⁷ - have been found by the Polish archaeological mission working upon this site; but the bilingual Latin-Greek dedication discovered in the near "Temple des Enseignes" even more explicitly fits our needs, since we are dealing with an *ex-voto* to *Zeus Hypsistos* whose name is rightly translated by *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus* in the Latin version of the same text³⁰⁸. We are facing, therefore a clear Monotheistic context here, where different ways to name the Supreme Deity appear simultaneously. The Monotheistic trend in Late Antiquity often raised to the head of the pantheon just one *agnòstos theòs*, one "Anonymous God"³⁰⁹, but in many situations this highest status was rather taken by the divinity that had been previously placed in the most prominent position of the pantheon, such as it was the case of *Sin* at Harràn³¹⁰. The reason why it was impossible for Harranians to use a divine epithet having a semantic value exactly equivalent to *Hypsistos* is quite evident: the Moon, both in the "Caldaeen" astronomical model and in the "Greek" one³¹¹, occupies the lowest place among the planets, so that it would have seemed contradictory to name the deity ruling over this heavenly body with an attribute such as "the Highest", in spite of the god's paramount rank largely acknowledged by his devotees.

We will finally try to understand whether, and up to what limits the "popular" religion of Harràn could be accepted by the surrounding Muslim State without any

Pag. 34

problem, provided that its natural features corresponded to a true expression of Monotheism such as Sabianism, namely "God-worship"/*Theosèbeia*. For this purpose, we shall analyse a well-known document about the Harranians recorded by al-Ma'sùdi, the sole witness to have personally visited – as M. Tardieu did not fail rightly to stress³¹² - the city of the Moon-God at the beginning of the IV H./X C.E. century. After having explained the religious traditions of this ancient people, by comparing their attitude of mind with the position of the Greek "philosophers"³¹³, the great Arabian historian concludes his paragraphs in the *Murùj* about Harràn by quoting the Arabic translation of the Syriac saying engraved upon the door of the only temple still existing there at that time. The saying, ascribed by him to Plato, recites *Man 'arafa dhata-hu ta'allaha*³¹⁴, and has been discussed at length by scholars

who have interpreted it in various ways: Chwolson proposed the reading “Wer seines (Gottes) Wesen erkennt, der verheret ihn auch”³¹⁵ - though he was also aware that the sentence was clearly marked back to Apollo’s precept *gnòthi sautòn*³¹⁶ - followed by the first French editor of *al-Murùj adh-dhaàb*, B. de Meynard (“Celui qui connaît Dieu le redoute”)³¹⁷. Tardieu - who collected information to demonstrate the migration of the last Neoplatonists, after Justinian closed the Academy of Athen (525 C.E.), from Greece to Harràn, where from then on Neoplatonist learning was to survive unexpectedly for centuries - bitterly criticised such a translation, by remembering the second French edition of the *Murùj* by Ch. Pellat, who rather translated the maxim: “Celui qui connaît sa nature devient dieu”³¹⁸. He did not notice, however, that an identical (French) translation had also been given by H. Corbin in his study “Rituel sabéen et exégèse ismaélienne du rituel”³¹⁹, probably for fear that such an observation could compromise his hypothesis about the Neoplatonist Academy’s survival in Harràn.

Actually we think that four virtual translations are simultaneously acceptable, though it is evident that, according to whether one chooses one translation or the other, the meaning of the saying, and consequently the Harranian position, must also change. We have already mentioned an excerpt from Seneca’s *Epistle XCV* (leaving apart the problem of Plato’s alleged authority) almost corresponding to the Harràn maxim, because it just goes as follows: *Deum colit qui novit*³²⁰, without openly stating yet what it is the subject should know, whether God or himself; usually, however, the statement is interpreted in general terms, namely in terms of universal knowledge, and is quite reasonable. Moreover, such a translation is perfectly in accordance with Muslim religious needs, since a charge of impiety and/or heresy against a similar sentence (with the doctrinal background which it naturally implies, of course) could certainly not be brought, so that it could be displayed openly to the Islamic public without raising any scandal. Finally, most important of all, this choice enjoys a lot of (quasi-)equivalent expressions through the Hermetic literature, which is the cultural framework closest to the philosophical-religious position of the Harranian Sabians, if it is true that precisely Harràn was one of the most relevant motherhomes to Hermetism during the Middle Ages³²¹, while its learned men gave an exceptionally heavy impulse and new vital sap to the so-called “Arabian Hermetism”: we limit ourselves to quoting two items only, the first one by Lactance: *è gàr eusèbeia gnòsis esti*

Pag. 35

toù theoù (“Piety is the knowledge of [the] God”)³²², the second one contained in the *Treatise IX* of the *Corpus Hermeticum*: *eusèbeia dè esti theoù gnòsis* (“Piety is God’s Knowledge”)³²³; in these last sentences the meaning of the Senecan *Epistle*’s excerpt (and that of the Harranian saying too) appears in fact to be really the same, as it emerged already from R. Reitzenstein’s remarks about the Harràn maxim which “*gnosis* und *eusèbeia* identifiziert”³²⁴.

It should not be forgotten that the idea of “becoming God”, of “deifying oneself” (but see Dante’s unusual verbal form “indiarsi”, also!)³²⁵ belongs fully to Hermetic conceptions, and therefore we do not absolutely rule out that such a translation of the Arabic verb *ta’allaha* might be possible nor that Harranians had just this meaning

secretly in mind by writing such a word upon the door of their great shrine; but it could not be proposed with such a sense to the Muslim neighbouring public ³²⁶, whereas the meaning “to worship”, “to adore” etc. (in a Monotheistic sense) is really plain and does not raise any sort of difficulty ³²⁷. On the contrary, it seems to us that there are not enough elements allowing us to decide whether the “knowledge” mentioned in the first half of the sentence precisely refers to God or to one’s own nature. We propose, therefore, the following “open” translation which is, in any case, the natural issue of our whole discussion: “Who knows His (of God) nature is a man who worships One (Most-High) God”, and/or “Who knows his (own) nature is a man who worships One (Most-High) God”, where the final expression has to be rather rendered into the periphrastic form “who is a (One Most-High) God-worshipper”, or, even better, into the only word “who is a Sabian”.

A Strictly Etymological Proposal: the Accadian Noun Sàbu

As far back as 1649, the orientalist E. Pocock proposed for the first time the idea of identifying the Sabians with “the worshippers of the heavenly army”, “the stars”, to whom the Old Testament often make reference (*sabà hash-shamayim*) ³²⁸. By advancing a similar proposal, the scholar had evidently in mind the astral Magic and generally the astrologic culture which, as a result of Maimonide’s opinion ³²⁹, was known as being the Sabians’ most remarkable feature: so no one wonders why many authors dealing with the “Sabian enigma” went on following his suggestions since that time, as for example the French student Michel Tardieu who simply appears to be the last exponent of this line of thought ³³⁰.

Actually the noun *sabà* means “soldiers, army, military service” ³³¹, but we guess that, if the Hebrew root *SBA* – both in nominal and in verbal form – has really some connections with the historical beginnings of the Sabian question, it is absolutely not because Sabianism is an astral religion or a form of heavenly idolatry, since the Harranian Sabianism itself cannot be entirely reduced to that. It is very tempting, for example, to imagine that the word had some relations with the cult(s) practised in a military environment, namely within a human milieu made up of mixed ethnical elements, by various nationalities, where the “strangers’ ” dominant presence was the

Pag. 36

rule rather than the exception ³³². For the moment, however, without increasing what L. Massignon once felicitously called “le roman syncrétistique des Sabéens” ³³³ with other fruitless speculations, it is worth paying more attention to the semantic values of the Hebrew root, considering the literary sources which allow us to see more in detail its several practical uses. Following this theme, one is given a genuine surprise: through the *Torah*, in fact, the terms connected to this root systematically recur in relation with the particular priestly duties and privileges of Levi’s tribe. Let us read, for instance, chapter IV of *Numbers*, verses 1-3: “And the Lord spoke unto Moses

and unto Aaron, saying: ‘Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers, from thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, *to do the work* in the tabernacle of the congregation’ ”³³⁴.

It is not difficult to see the close semantic links between the military service and the special tasks imposed on the members of the Levite clan which can be paralleled because of the similarity that exists between the soldier’s heavy burdens and the Levite’ weighty responsibilities consisting in carrying out their sacerdotal duties in the Temple. But there is more than that. The concept of “service” seems in fact to recur not fortuitously through the available textual evidence about the Sabians, since we have to do with two items occupying a significant position in the already quoted Arabian manual of Magic *Gayat al-Hakim*. The first one is a general definition of the “Sabians”, where it is said that they are nothing else but “the Nabataean *servants* of Chaldaeans”³³⁵; in the Latin version of the work, the *Picatrix*, the whole expression is slightly different, but the semantic bulk of “service” remains unwavering: *Zabii = servi capti Chaldaeum*³³⁶. The second text is relevant by itself, because it is part of the *Gaya*’s introduction to the Sabian planetary prayers: “And among the operations of the Sàbians is what al-Tabari the astrologer says concerning the drawing down of the power of the planets. He says: ‘That which is known to me concerning the drawing down of the planets and their services which I found attributed to the leaders of the Sabians and the servants of the temples, is what I will say. They say ...’ ”³³⁷.

We think that the Jewish linguistic background had certainly played a very remarkable role in modelling the Arabic verb(s) *saba’ a/sabà* and upon the name(s) “Sabian/Sabians” connected with them, both from the point of view of the Hebraic wisdom and from the common usage of language, as we have learnt dealing with the root *SHUBH* and with some technical figures of the Hebraic culture like the *ger toshàb*, as well as with some proper names such as *Elizabeth*³³⁸. From a strictly etymological point of view, however, we are convinced that, if all these linguistic elements are fully pertinent, they must be considered at the same time in terms of progressive semantic intersections, issuing with an ever-increasing meaningfulness from the original noun which we believe does not come from Hebrew.

At this point, we have become familiar with a wide semantic field, the general co-ordinates of which are expressed by terms and concepts such as “People(s), Nation(s), Greek(s), Soldier(s), Stranger(s), Servant(s), etc.”. Is there any coherence in that? We think so, mostly after having acknowledged the historical relationships between the particular roles played by these groups of people in reference to the

prevailing religion according to the double-faced perspective according to which such a phenomenon was viewed in Late Antiquity, also beyond the frontier of the Roman Empire.

On the other hand, we have performed a short but essential survey about the third big Monotheistic community besides Jews and Christians occupying a significant place within the religious framework of Late Antiquity, the God-Fearers. Even if they did not define themselves by the same variety of names, we have observed a lot of technical terms in different languages by which their neighbours used to call and

recognise these groups of believers: these expressions range from “God-Fearers” (*Phoboùmenoi tôn Theòn, Metuentes Deum*), “God-Worshippers” (*Sebòmenoi tôn Theòn, Theosebeis, Colentes Deum*), Heaven(s)-Worshippers (*Yere’i ash-shamayim, Caelicolae*), “Devotees of the Most-High God” (*Hypsistarii, Hypsistiani*), “Those who pray” (*Massaliani*), “Those who bless” (*Euphemitai*), “Those who leave their religion (for another)” (*Hunafà’*). Besides, one can add perhaps the other two expressions used for naming Christians which we were dealing with: “Fearers” (*Tarsakàn*) and “The Servants” (*al-Ibàd*).

The inter-linguistic antecedent parallel of the above observed Hebrew term *sabà* is, as it not seldom happens, an Accadian one. Let us read what the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* accounts for: “*sàbu*: s. masc.; group of people, contingent of workers, troop of soldiers, army, people, population; from OAkk. on; mostly used as a collective, pl. *sàbù*, for *sàbiu* (Oakk.) see discussion, stat. const. *sàb* and *sàbi*, wr. syll. and (LU)ERIN.MESH, ERIN.KHLA”³⁴⁰. At first sight the noun seems to be in perfect phonetic correspondence with the Arabic common plural *Sàbi’ùn* as well as with the collective plural *Sàbi’a* (and also with the more unusual forms *Sàbùn, Sàba*). Concerning the meaning, it is possible to imagine a semantic evolution someway similar to the well-known process undergone by the Hebrew noun *gèr*, whose primary meaning of “stranger” developed as a consequence of the deep changes within the Israelite society in the course of centuries, evolving therefore from the original social meaning and evolving towards the social-religious one of “full convert to Judaism”, namely of “proselyte”³⁴¹. Mostly because the Accadian noun does not fail to show a singular religious value linked – as far as we understand *Dictionary*’s quotations – to the activity of the temple’s specialized “personnel”³⁴². If the last one is really the true origin of the word, Arabic *Sàbi’ùn* would literally mean simply “People”, but with a particular religious nuance due to the numerous lexical intersections which we have met, the most important of which is surely that of “leaving one’s religion in order to worship One Most-High God”.

Pag. 38

Conclusions

The strength of the idea of identifying the Sabians with the God-Fearers, namely the worshippers of One Most-High God, lies in the exceptional correspondence of the latter group not only with the three Koranic paragraphs mentioning *Sàbi’ùn*, but also with most of the Arab-Islamic sources of the Middle Ages, in spite of the often hazy, loose, or even contradictory nature of such information. As far as the *Koran*’s passages are concerned, we believe that the chains Muslims-Jews-Christians-Sabians (*Sura II*), Muslims, Jews, Sabians Christians (*Sura V*) and Muslims-Jews-Sabians-

Christians-Magians-Unbelievers (*Sura XXII*) should be understood in terms of a sketch-map of the Universal Religions, though not chronologically listed, in some way similar to the one contained in Aristide's *Apology* or to the other one shown by the famous *Kartir's* Mid-Persian *Inscription*: consequently, we find it impossible that the place of the Sabian group within the Muslims' Holy Book might be occupied by a simple sect such as Mandaeans, even if the last important work recently published on the subject by S. Gunduz goes on presenting this old theory once again. But an even more important reason why only God-Fearers appear perfectly able to take upon themselves the problematic identity of this community is that no other one possesses the singular features drawn by the definition of the Sabians often recurring in many literary sources, namely that they are "a religious group which has no cult, scripture and prophet, admitting only the *tawhid*, the profession of faith: 'There is no god but God'". A religion with similar features is a kind of a paradox, but God-Fearers prove that the contrary is true: the available evidence about their beliefs and ritual practices, in fact, is quite meagre, as well as that about their gathering places, so that on the whole one can just state that they shared the universal code of moral-religious duties generally known by the label of "Noachite laws".

We should remember that "Noah's Laws" were also the limited set of observances foreseen by the Jerusalem Council (51 C.E.) for uncircumcised Christians (*Ecclesia ex Gentibus*). Together with other common religious features shared by both groups, this factor may explain why the first Latin translation of the *Koran*, fully corroborating our theory, seems not to distinguish completely between Christians and God-Fearers; the same things happened – as Pines demonstrated – in the regions where different Iranian languages were spoken, since the name for Christians in Persia is still today just *Tarsakàn*, "Fearers": this historical confusion may suggest that the "Sabians" mentioned by Muhammad might perhaps be nothing else but an alternative name for "Christians".

Our theoretical proposal is in accordance, besides, with another important traditional opinion about the Sabians, that they are a "people who leave their religion (for another)". Such an idea comes apparently from the Arabic root(s) *SB/SBW*, but we have checked the Hebrew root *SHWBH* which it seems likely had a very significant influence upon the Arabic one(s). Al-Biruni's statement that the Sabians are "the adherents of the prevailing religion" is closely connected with this line of thought, even if it seems not to derive from lexicographic sources. Needless to say, the last definition just like the previous ones cannot seriously be applied to any

Pag. 39

existing religion, nor to a religious phenomenon such as Conversion. Surely one of the factors which played a crucial role in this sense, also from a linguistic point of view, was the existence of an original group such as the God-Fearers, who are not adequately defined by a name like "Converts", but rather by that of "Mid-Converts", or even better by one of the above recorded periphrastic expressions.

We have observed on the other hand the substantial closeness between God-Fearers and *Hunafà'*, who likewise are people in search of God without having any cult, scripture and prophet, generally following only the "Noachite Laws". Yet there is perhaps one difference, namely that the latter are – as far as we know – just

individuals, whereas the former are organized groups sharing the same Monotheistic faith, even if it is not possible to rule out completely the existence of some scattered *Hunafà'* communities.

Speaking about the Harranians, the Monotheistic nature of their beliefs has come to light not only in relation to the highly developed Neoplatonic system adopted by their learned men, whose apex is occupied by a transcendental God named “the Most-High” or the “Lord of the High Building” by the famous manual of Magic *Gayat al-Hakim (Picatrix)*, but also in connection to popular devoutness, as it is shown by the cultic place of Sumatar Harabesi not distant from Harran, where in the middle of the II c. C.E. the Moon-God *Sin* at the head of the local pantheon was worshipped bearing the title of *Marilahé* (“Lord of the gods”), an Aramaic expression which, as some findings in Hatra and Palmyra allow one to understand, is an equivalent of the Greek name *Theòs Hypsistos*.

Through our whole discussion a wide semantic field somehow connected to the Sabian question comes out, the general boundary-lines of which include words/concepts of different linguistic origin like “Greek(s), People(s), Nation(s), Stranger(s), Soldier(s), Servant(s)” etc. Meanwhile, many expressions used to name God-Fearers have emerged, including words/concepts like Changing One’s Religion for Another, (Mid-)Conversion, To Adhere to the Prevailing Religion, Symphatizers, Worshippers etc. in connection with a divine figure such as the Most-High God sometimes conceived as the Heaven(s). On the other hand, a possible link of the Hebrew root *SBA* (“army, soldiers”, but also “religious service”) with Arabic *Sàbi’ùn* had been proposed a long time ago. As a result of all these pieces of evidence, we believe that the parallel Accadian lemma *sàbu* (“army, people, population etc.”) might be a correct etymological solution for the word *Sàbi’ùn*: the original noun would have undergone a linguistic evolution somewhat similar to that of the Hebrew *ger* (which, from its primary social meaning of “stranger”, had ended up in the course of time denoting a social-religious figure such as a “proselyte”), by means of several linguistic intersections (Hebrew *sabà*, *shubh*, *sabbàth*, *Elizabeth* etc.) the most important of which is no doubt represented by the Greek verbs/nouns *sèbein*, *sèbesthai*, *oì sebòmenoi*, *theosebeis* etc. whose technical sense is well known. Such a historical-religious process should have had a very reasonable issue, that is “Sabians” = “People who leave their religion in order to worship One Most-High God”.

The difficulty for identifying correctly the former subject is that only very recently has the historical weight of God-Fearers been fully acknowledged by scholars: having to face a sort of a double unknown-quantity equation (some scholars

Pag. 40

have even doubted their existence!), one cannot fail to wonder why the right solution of the problem was not found for a such long time. This point is closely paralleled by the non-acknowledgement of a crucial religious frontier, on the border of a phenomenon which one can call “Pagan Monotheism”, namely the ever increasing spread of the *Theòs Hypsistos’* cult and of a popular Monotheistic culture in Late Antiquity, realities that on the contrary have to be viewed as “the seed-bed into which Jewish and Christian theology could readily be planted. Without them the

transformation of ancient patterns of belief ... to ... Judaism, Christianity and Islam might not have occurred at all”.

Pag. 41

ABBREVIATIONS

AV = Arabic Version

ET = English Translation

FT = French Translation

GT = German Translation

LT = Latin Translation

AAWG = *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*

ABSA = *Annual of the British School of Athens*

AHDLMA = *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*

AJA = *American Journal of Archaeology*

ANRW = *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*

AO = *Acta Orientalia*

ARW = *Archiv für Religionswissenschaften*

AS = *Anatolian Studies*

BC = F.J. FOAKES JACKSON – KIRSOPP LAKE eds, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Part I, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vols. I-V, London 1926-33

BEO = *Bulletin d'Études Orientales*

BIFAO = *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archeologie Orientale*

BThR = *Biblical Theological Review*

BZAW = *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

CBQ = *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

CCIS = E.N. LANE, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Sabazii*, EPRO, 100, Vols I-III, Leiden 1983-89

CH = *Corpus Hermeticum*

CIG = *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*

CIJ = J.B. FREY, *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* I-II

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

CIS = *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*

CRAI = *Comptes-Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions*

CRAIBL = *Comptes-Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*

CSCO = *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*

DB = *Dictionnaire de la Bible*

EI = *Encyclopedie de l'Islam*

EI² = *Encyclopedie de l'Islam deuxième édition*

EJ = *Encyclopaedia Judaica*

EphAn = *Epigraphica Anatolica*

EPRO = *Études Préliminaires aux Religions dans l'Empire Roman*

ERE = *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*

ErJb = *Eranos Jahrbuch*

ETSE = *Études Slaves et Est-Europeennes/Slavic and East European Studies*
 GAS = F. SEZGIN, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*, Leiden 1967-84
 GCS = *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*
 GGR = M.P. NILSSON, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion*
 GLAJJ = M. STERN, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, I-III, Jerusalem 1974-84
 GPJ = V. TCHERIKOVER, A. FUKS, M. STERN, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* I-III
 GRBS = *Greek, Roman and Bizantine Studies*
 HALAT = *Hebraisches und Aramaisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament*
 HR = *History of Religions*
 HSCPh = *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
 HTR = *Harvard Theological Review*
 HUCA = *Hebrew Union Annual College*
 IGLS = *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie*
 IGR = R. CAGNAT *et alii*, *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*
 ILCV = E. DIEHL, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*, Berlin 1961
 IOS = *Israel Oriental Studies*
 JA = *Journal Asiatique*
 JE = *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*
 JHS = *Journal of Hellenic Studies*
 JIWE = D. NOY, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*
 JJS = *Journal of Jewish Studies*
 JPOS = *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*
 JQR = *Jewish Quarterly Review*
 JRAS = *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
 JRS = *Journal of Roman Studies*
 JSGRP = E.R. GOODENOUGH, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, New York 1953-65
 JSJ = *Journal for the Study of Judaism*
 JSNT = *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
 JSocS = *Jewish Social Studies*
 JSS = *Journal of Semitic Studies*
 JThS = *The Journal of Theological Studies*
 JWCI = *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*
 MB = *Musée Belge*
 MIDEO = *Melanges de l'Institut Domenicain d' Études Orientales*
 MUSJ = *Melanges de l'Univerté de St. Joseph*
 MW = *The Muslim World*
New Documents = *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*
 OGIS = *Oriens Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, ed. W. DITTENBERGER, Leipzig 1903-1905
 PBA = *Proceedings of the British Academy*
 PCPhS = *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*
 PG = J.P. MIGNE, *Patrologia Graeca*
 PIAASH = *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*
 PL = J.P. MIGNE, *Patrologia Latina*
 POC = *Proche Orient Chrétien*
 PS = *Patrologia Syriaca*
 RA = *Revue Archéologique*
 RAC = *Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum*
 RB = *Revue Biblique*
 RE = PAULY-WISSOWA, *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*
 REJ = *Revue des Études Juives*
 RFIC = *Rivista di Filologia e d'Istruzione Classica*
 RHE = *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*
 RHR = *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*
 RIDA = *Revue International des Droits de l'Antiquité*
 RIPB = *Revue de l'Instruction Publique en Belgique*

RN = *Revue Numismatique*

ROSCHER's *Lexicon* = W. ROSCHER, *Lexicon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*

RTPPh = *Revue de Theologie et Philosophie*

SCHURER-VERMES-MILLAR-GOODMAN, *History of the Jewish People* = E. SCHURER, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, A New English Version Revised and Edited by G. VERMES, F. MILLAR, M. GOODMAN, Edinburgh 1973 - 1986

SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

SEP = *Studien zur Epigraphic und Papyruskunde*

SJLA = *Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity*

SPAW = *Sitzungsberichte der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*

SI = *Studia Islamica*

ST = *Studia Theologica*

TLZ = *Theologische Literaturzeitung*

TWAT = *Theologische Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*

TWNT = *Theologische Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*

VC = *Vigiliae Christianae*

ZAW = *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

ZDMG = *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*

ZNW = *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

ZPE = *Zeitschrift für Papirologie und Epigraphik*

ZS = *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und Verwandte Gebiete*

Generally the Works are quoted in the original language, and the translation is cited thereafter. When we quote a title in the original language, we refer to the original edition of the text; when we quote the translation, we refer to the translated work (es.: AL-BALADHURI, *Futùh al-buldàn*, ed. Beirut 1398 H./1978, ET by P.K. HITTI, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, New York 1916: AL-BALADHURI, *Futùh al-buldàn* = AV; AL-BALADHURI, *The Origins* = ET).

NOTES

1) A. FRATINI - C. PRATO, *I Sebòmenoi (tòn Theòn): Una Risposta all' Antico Enigma dei Sabei*, Rome 1977 (in Italian, with an English Summary).

2) The literature about the subject is enormous. We record here just some of the relevant studies chronologically predating a basically turning-point such as Aphrodisia; most of the other ones will be quoted in the course of discussion: E. SCHURER, "Die Juden im bosphoranischen Reiche und die Genossenschaften der *sebòmenoi theòn hypsiston* ebendasselbst", *Sitzungsberichte der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Berlin 1897, pp.199-225; K. LAKE, "Proselytes and G-d Fearers", in F. FOAKES JACKSON - K. LAKE eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity*, I, *The Acts of Apostles*, Vol. 5, London 1933, pp.74-96; G. BERTRAM, art. "Theosebès", *TWNT* III, pp.124-8; L. FELDMAN, "Jewish 'Sympathizers' in Classical Literature and Inscriptions", *TAPA*, 81 (1950), pp.200-8; L. ROBERT, *Nouvelles Inscriptions de Sardes*, I, Paris 1964, pp.39-45; K. ROMANIUK, "Die Gottesfürchtigen im Neuen Testament", *Aegyptus* 44 (1964), pp.66-91; T. KLAUSER, "Synagogé tòn Ioudaìon kai Theosebòn. Die Aussage einer bosphoranischen Freilassungsschrift (CIRB 71) zum Problem der 'Gottesfürchtigen'", *JAC* 8/9

(1965), pp.171-6; B. LIFSHITZ, “Du Nouveau sur les Sympathisants”, *JSJ* 1 (1970), pp.77-84; F. SIEGERT, “Gottesfurchtige und Sympathisanten”, *JSJ* 4 (1973), pp.109-64.

3) For the choice of a technical term such as “God-Worshippers” instead of “God-Fearers” (because of the evident connection of the latter expression to a Jewish background) see P. R. TREBILCO, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*, Cambridge 1991, p.246 n.1: “ ‘God-worshipper’, a translation of *theosebès*, ... is a more appropriate term than ‘God-fearer’, a translation of *phobòmenoi tôn theòn*, which occurs only in Acts”; cf. T. RAJAK, “Jews and Christians as Groups in a Pagan World”, in J. NEUSNER - E. S. FRIERICHS eds., *To See Ourselves as Others See Us*, Chico California 1985, p.255. See also SIEGERT’s important study “Gottesfurchtige und Sympthisanten” quoted above (n. 2), containing the best survey, at that date (1973), of the literary and epigraphic witnesses about God-Fearers. In the chapt. 13th of the *Book of Acts*, Luke intentionally replaces the latter expression with the former, which thereafter does not appear any longer in the text. As M. WILCOX (“The ‘God-Fearers’ in Acts: a Reconsideration”, *JSNT* 13 [1981], p.118) rightly stresses: ““The changeover from *phobòmenoi tôn theòn* to *sebòmenoi tôn theòn* corresponds to a shift in emphasis in Acts from the basically Torah-centered piety of the earlier part to the Gentile mission of the later section ... The fact suggests that their use and distribution matches Luke’s intention in his portrayal of events”. When we use “God-Fearers”, therefore, we employ the expression in a non-rigid sense. For the “Fear of God” in the *Old Testament* culture see G. NAGEL, “Crainte et Amour de Dieu dans l’Ancien Testament”, *RThPhil* 23 (1945), pp.175-86; B. OLIVIER, “La Crainte de Dieu comme Valeur Religieuse dans l’Ancien Testament”, in *Les Etudes Religieuses*, Paris 1960, p.66 (“... crainte de Dieu, qui recouvre comme dans tout le mouvement sapientiel l’ensemble de la piété, de la vie morale, d’une religion de la fidélité interieure”) and *passim*; H. BALZ, art. “*Phobèò, phobèòmai*”, *TWNT* IX, mostly pp.197-216.

4) We use the expression exactly in the following technical sense: “God-Fearers” = “People of pagan origin worshipping the Most-High God”, without investigating which kind of relation they had with the Jewish religious milieu. We follow therefore S. MITCHELL, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews and Christians”, in P. ATHANASSIADI - M. FREDE, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 1999, p.119: “*Theosebès* was a specific, technical term used to describe themselves by the worshippers of Theos Hypsistos. It served to identify them both among themselves and to the outside world. The prefix *theo-* should not be understood in a loose sense as referring to any god, but precisely to the highest, the one and only god, whom they revered”. There are many scholars thinking that the epithet “Hypsistos” does not necessarily imply Jewish influence: A.D. NOCK - C. ROBERTS - T.C. SKEAT, “The Guild of Zeus Hypsistos”, *HTR* 29 (1936), pp.64-9 (repr. in A.D. NOCK, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, I, Oxford 1972, pp.414-43); L. ROBERT, “Reliefs Votifs et Cultes d’Anatolie”, *Anatolia* 3 (1958), pp.119; T. DREW-BEAR, “Local Cults in Graeco-Roman Phrygia”, *GRBS* 17 (1976), pp. 248; S. M. SHERWIN-WHITE, “A Note on Three Coan Inscriptions”, *ZPE* 21 (1976), p. 187; G.H.R. HORSLEY, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, I, Macquarie University 1976, p. 26; E. N. LANE, *Corpus Monumentorum Religionis dei Menis*, III, *EPRO* 19, Leiden 1976, p.94; M. SIMON, “Jupiter-Yahwè”, *Numen* 23 (1986), pp.40-66; M. TATSCHÉVA-HITOVA, *Eastern Cults in Moesia Inferior and Thracia (5th Century BC – 4th Century AD)*, *EPRO* 95, Leiden 1983, pp.203-4 and 211-15; E. BERNARD, “Au Dieu très Haut”, in *Hommages à Jean Cousin. Rencontres avec l’Antiquité Classique*, Institut Felix Gaffiot, I, Paris 1983, pp 111; S. E. JOHNSON, “The Present State of Sabazios Research”, *ANRW* II, 17.3, pp. 1606-7; Yulia USTINOVA, *The Supreme Gods of the Bosporan Kingdom. Celestial Aphrodite and the Most-High God*, Leiden 1999, pp.183-287.

5) For the scholars who, in spite of all, do not agree with this opinion see below n. 9.

6) The discovery was made during the preparations for construction of the Aphrodisias Museum, in connection with the excavation on the site conducted by Prof. Erim, sponsored by New York University and supported by National Geographic Society. First archaeological reports by Prof. K.T. ERIM himself in *AJA* 81 (1977), p.306, and *AS* 27 (1977), p.31.

7) J. REYNOLDS - R. TANNENBAUM, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisia*, *PCPhS*, Suppl. Vol. 12 , Cambridge 1987, edited and commented the original Greek text (cf. J. LINDERSKY’s Review, *Gnomon* 63 (1991), p.561: “... our inscription is a treasure”): for *osioi theosebès* see p.6, face B, l.35 (two *theosebès* are also mentioned at p.5, face A, ll.19-20: Commentary pp.48-67; for proselytes see below, p.24 and ns. 207-8. For a short account of the event by the same Authors, see “Jews and God-Fearers in the Holy City of Aphrodite”, *BThR* 12.5 (Sept.-Oct. 1986), pp.54-7. Aphrodisia’s discovery suddenly moved the general pattern about God-Fearers, lighting again the discussion onto the subject to a great extent: WILCOX, op. cit. (above n.3); M. SIMON, art. “Gottesfurchtiger”, *RAC* XI, cols. 1060-70; Th. M. FINN, “The God-Fearers

Reconsidered”, *C BQ* 47 (1985), pp.75-84; J. G. GAGER, “Jews, Gentiles, and Synagogues in the Book of Acts”, *HTR* 79.1-3 (1986), pp.91-99; L. H. KANT, “Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin”, *ANRW* II, 20.2, Berlin 1987, pp. 671-713; E. SCHURER, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, A New English Version Revised and Edited by G. VERMES, F. MILLAR, M. GOODMAN, III, 1, Edinburgh 1986, chap. 5; L. H. FELDMAN, “Proselytes and ‘Sympathizers’ in the Light of the New Inscriptions from Aphrodisia”, *REJ* 118.3-4 (Jul.-Dec. 1989), pp.265-305; Idem, *Jews and Gentiles in the Ancient World. Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian*, Princeton 1993, pp..342-382 (“The Success of Jews in Winning ‘Sympathizers’ “; notes pp.569-80); TREBILCO, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*, pp.145-66; J. M. LIEU, “The Race of the God-Fearers”, *JThS* 46 (1995), pp.483-501. Irina LEVINSKAYA’s *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting (The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, Vol. 5), Grand Rapids 1996, pp.51-126, no doubt contains the most complete and exhaustive survey of the evidence, even if the full list and discussion of the literary documents is furnished by Feldman, in his second study above cited.

8) The key-word in the original Greek text is read *patella* by REYNOLDS-TANNENBAUM, *Jews and God-Fearers*, p.27, and consequently interpreted in terms of a “‘distributory station for charity food’ – i.e. ‘a community soup kitchen’. Such a place is also called *samhui* in the rabbinical sources ... The institution was current at the earliest likely date of our inscription [about the half of the III c. C.E.] in Palestine Jewish communities”. Both the word’s reading and the date proposed by the authors have been criticized: the issues of the discussion are uninteresting for our purposes, so that we limit ourselves to quote the dense *lemma* 918, *SEG* 41 (1991), pp.302-3, where many useful references are given; add Margaret H. WILLIAMS, “The Jews and Godfearers Inscription from Aphrodisia – A Case of Patriarchal Interference in Early 3rd Century Caria?”, *Historia* 41.3 ((1992), pp.297-310; H. BOTERMANN, “Griechisch-judische Epigraphic: zur Datierung der Aphrodisias-Inschriften”, *ZPE* 98 (1993), pp.184-94 (where 2 proselytes and 3 *theosebeis* are wrongly counted, instead of the reverse); P. van MINNEN, “Drei Bemerkungen zur Geschichte des Judentums in der griechisch-romischen Welt”, *ZPE* 100 (1994), pp.253-258; Marianne PALMER-BOLZ, “The Jewish Donor Inscriptions from Aphrodisias: Are They Both Third-Century, and Who Are the Theosebeis?”, *HSCPh* 96 (1994), pp.281-299. For the socio-religious class of “donors” see the classical *Donateurs et Fondateurs dans les Synagogues Juives*, B. LIFSHITZ ed., Paris 1997.

9) A.T. KRAABEL is no doubt the scholar who with most conviction continued to argue strongly that the various expressions usually translated as “God-Fearers” (*sebòmenoi/phoboùmenoi* [tòn theòn], *theosebeis*, *metuentes* etc.) cannot be interpreted as technical terms, in spite of the clear evidence coming out from Aphrodisia; moreover, he put in doubt the historical reliability of Luke’s picture of the facts mentioned in *Acts*. See his several provoking (cf. the definition ‘enfant terrible’ given to him by LEVINSKAYA, op. cit. [above n.7], p.21) articles: “The Disappearance of the God-Fearers”, *Numen* 28 (1981), pp.113-26; “The Roman Diaspora: Six Questionable Assumptions”, *JJS* 33 (1982), pp.445-64; “Synagoga Caeca: Systematic Distorsion in Gentile Interpretation of the Evidence for Judaism in the Early Christian Period”, in NEUSNER-FRERICHS eds., *To See Ourselves as Others See Us*; “Greeks, Jews and Lutherans in the Middle Half of Acts”, in G.W.E. NICKELSBURG - G. MacRAE eds., *Christians among Jews and Gentiles: Essays in Honour of Krister Stendhal on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (= *HTR* 79 [1986]), pp.147-157; (with S. Mc LENNAN) “The G-d-Fearers – A Literary and Theological Invention”, *BThR* 12.5 (Sept-Oct. 1986), pp.46-53. J. MURPHY- O’ CONNOR, “Lots of God-Fearers? *Theosebeis* in the Aphrodisia Inscription”, *RB* 99.2 (1992), pp.418-24, shares the same opinions of Kraabel, as well as R.S. KRAEMER, “On the Meaning of the Term ‘Jew’ in Graeco-Roman Inscriptions”, *HTR* 82.1 (1989), pp.35-53, in spite that the “inscription from ancient Aphrodisia has been read by a number of scholars as the definitive evidence against Kraabel’s interpretation” (*ibid.* p.36 n.4).

10) That is the title of a J.B. SEGAL’s popular article: “The Sabian Mysterries. The Planet-Cult in Ancient Harràn”, in E. BACON ed., *Vanished Civilizations: Forgotten Peoples of the Ancient World*, London 1963, pp.201-20. The author, who is one of the few contemporary students having been deeply concerned with the Sabian culture, wrote several works about the subject: “Pagan Syriac Monuments in the Vilayet of Urfa”, *AS* 3 (1953), pp.97-119; “Mesopotamian Communities from Julian to the Rise of Islam”, *PBA* 41 (1955), pp.109-39; *Edessa and Harràn. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered on 9 May 1962*, London 1963; *Edessa, “The Blessed City”*, Oxford 1970.

11) About the theoretical connection Peoples-Religions, see below p.23 and n. 195.

12) About Harràn is worth while remembering at least the quite recent essay of Tamara M. GREEN, *The City of the Moon-God. Religious Traditions of Harràn*, Leiden-New-York-Koln, 1992, that is the only

existing monograph entirely dedicated to this city and its very original inhabitants so strongly linked to their noble religious traditions (G. FEHERVARI's article "Harràn", *EF*², III, pp. 227-230, is an useful instrument for approaching the subject). Our *Harràn. La Luna e la Religione dei Filosofi* (Rome 1991), treats the same matter in a more popular way.

13) D. CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, St. Petersburg 1856 (= Amsterdam 1965): this big two volumes work (the second one including only text and commentary of the historical sources) counts 1745 pages!

14) *Sura* 2, 62; 5, 69; 22, 17. We shall use the *Qur'an's* translation of M.M. ALI, *Translation of the Holy Quran*, Lahore 1934.

15) About the Harrànian Sabians, beyond the titles already listed, we quote here for the moment: B DODGE, "The Sabians of Harràn", in F. SARRUF - S. TAMIM eds., *American University of Beirut Festival Book*, Beirut 1967, pp.59-85; J. TUBACH, *Im Schatten des Sonnengottes*, Wiesbaden 1986; C. BUCK, "The Identity of the Sàbi'ùn: An Historical Quest", *MW* 74 (1984), pp.172-86; Th. FAHD, art. "Sàbi'a", *EF*², VIII (1986), pp.694-8; M. TARDIEU, "Sàbiens coraniques et 'Sàbiens' de Harràn", *JA* 274 (1986), pp.1-44; F. De BLOIS, "The 'Sabians' (Sàbi'ùn) in Pre-Islamic Arabia", *AO*, 56 (1955), pp.39-61. For the persisting duration of the *Sin's* cult at Harràn, the essays published in connection with the Turkish-British archaeological campaign on the site going back to the past sixties are still useful: S. LLOYD-W. BRICE, "Harràn", *AS* 1 (1951), pp.77-111; D.S. RICE, "Medieval Harràn. Studies on its Topography and Monuments I", *AS* 2 (1952), pp.36-83; but see also the same authors' popular reports come out onto *The Illustrated London News* 222 (21th Feb. 1953), pp.287-9 ("Seeking the Temple of *Sin*") and 231 (21th Sept. 1957), pp.466-9 ("From *Sin* to Saladin"). For the religious history of the Sumerian Moon-God, see E. COMBE, *Histoire du culte de Sin*, Paris 1908; A. SJOBERG, *Der Mondgott Nanna-Suen in der sumerischen Uberlieferung*, Stockolm 1960

16) The book of S. GUNDUZ, *The Knowledge of Life. The Origins and Early History of the Mandaean and Their Relation to the Sabians of the Quràn and to the Harranians*, *JSS* Suppl. Vol. 3, Oxford 1994 is the last scientific contribute to such a theory which has never failed to get some supporters. Among the most convinced ones, we can certainly record K RUDOLPH and Lady E.S. DROWER who have consecrated to Mandaean all their scholarly life (abundant bibliography upon both authors' works in GUNDUZ, *ibid.*, pp.239-40 and 246-7): their theoretical position is winded up in a jiffy by TARDIEU, "Sàbiens", p.6 and n.16.

17) IBN AL-NADIM, *Kitàb al-Fihrist*, ed. G. FLUGEL, Leipzig 1872; ET by B. DODGE, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, New York-London 1970, pp.751-3. A similar version of the facts, even if much shorter than that, is given by HAMZA ISFAHANI, *Ta'rikh sinì mulük al-ard wa l-anbiyà'*, LT by I.M.E. GOTTWALDT, Petropoli-Lipsiae, 1848, p.3; and by AL-KHWARIZMI, *Mafàtih al-'ulüm*, ed. G. Van VLOTEN, Lugd. Bat. 1895, p.36 (= CHWOLSON, op. cit., II, p.504 and p.506). Though not changing the information's bulk, it seems us quite interesting the Greek word (= "neighbourhood", "proximity") quoted in brackets by the English translator of AL-BIRUNI, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, ed. and ET by E. SACHAU, London 1879, p.314 f.: "The same name is also applied to the Harrànians ... although they themselves did not adopt this name before A.H. 228 under Abbasid rule, solely for the purpose of being reckoned among those from whom the duties of *Dhimma* (*metoikìa*) are accepted and towards whom the laws of *Dhimma* were observed. Before that time they were called heathens, idolaters, and Harrànians". For the connection *pàroikos* (= *mètoikos*) – *ger* - proselyte, see SCHURER-VERMES-MILLAR-GOODMAN, *The History of the Jewish People*, III, 1, p.170 n.78 (with abundant items from *Talmud* and *Mishnah's* writings): "The word [*ger*] is originally equivalent to *pàroikos*, *advena*, but later a convert to Judaism – *nomimòis proselelytòs tois Ioudaikois*, *Ant.* xviii, 3, 5 (82)".

18) CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier*, I, chap. 5 ("Ueber die babylonischen Ssabier im Coràn oder die Mendaiten"), pp.100-38. The Russian orientalist accepts an idea previously proposed by J.D. MICHAELIS, *Orientalischen Bibliothek*, Vol. 13, Frankfurt 1778, p.30 and Vol. 18, 1782, p.52, p.54, and by M. NORBERG, *De Religione et Lingua Sabaeorum Commentatio*, Comment. Soc. Reg. Societ. Gott., Vol. III, 1781 (cf. CHWOLSON, op. cit., I, p.66 ff.).

19) So for example J. PEDERSEN, "The Sabians", in T.W. ARNOLD - R.A. NICHOLSON eds., *'Ajab-nàma. A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to E.G. Browne*, Cambridge 1922, p.387. Further criticisms already by T. NOLDEKE, Review to *Thesaurus sive Liber Magnus vulgo Liber Adami appellatus Opus*

Mandaeorum ..., ed. H. PETERSMANN, *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, I, Leipzig 1869, pp.481-501; W. BRANDT, *Elchasai, ein Religionstifter und sein Werk*, Giessen 1912 p.144 ff.

20) G. SEMERANO, *Le Origini della Cultura Europea*, Firenze 1984.

21) G. SEMERANO, *L'Infinito: un Equivoco Millenario*, Milano 2001.

22) See U. GALIMBERTI, Review to SEMERANO's *L'Infinito* in *La Repubblica*, 14/06/2001, "Il Linguista che fa tremare l'Accademia".

23) SEMERANO, *Le Origini*, I, p.7 ff.

24) SEMERANO, *Le Origini*, II, p.492 f., where the ancient tale handed down by the Greek historian Hellanicos (V c. B.C.E.) which gave birth to such a belief is recorded; cf. GALIMBERTI, Review.

25) SEMERANO, *ibidem*; cf. GALIMBERTI, Review.

26) He was heavily struck by his only son's premature death (*Le Origini* is dedicated to him); moreover, in coincidence with the dramatic flood of the Arno river (1966), most of his papers were lost.

27) That is what the scholar declared during a television Interview (R.A.I. III, Italian National Channel) on 01/01/2002.

28) It is not infrequent the error of imagining that the Ancient World generally ignored Anti-Semitism: see the wide and well-documented survey by J. G. GAGER, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes towards Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, New-York 1983, or also J. PARKER, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue. A Study on the Origins of Antisemitism*, New-York 1934 (= 1974).

29) SEMERANO, Interview; cf. Idem, *L'Infinito*, p. 9 ff.

30) GALIMBERTI, Review.

31) The same fact happens with the Greek verbs which we are mostly concerned with, in particular *sèbo/sèbomai*: it is quite absurd that none Greek Etymological Dictionary (CHANTRAINE, FRISK etc.) contemplates the possibility of a Semitic origin of the root.

32) "L'avvio alla linguistica storica che viene qui avviata - SEMERANO writes (*Le Origini*, I, p.viii) - ha finalmente dato una base concreta a quel vago termine 'mediterranea' con cui si designarono sinora le origini di voci che non s'inquadavano nel sistema linguistico così detto indoeuropeo. Essa pone come sistema o quadro di riferimento l'idioma che ha la più antica e più larga documentazione scritta, l'accadico, della famiglia delle lingue semitiche, con tracce di sostrato sumero, e i cui documenti più remoti risalgono alla metà del III millennio a.C.".

33) Accadian was completely decoded in the half of the XIX century.

34) SEMERANO, *Le Origini*, I, p.xxii; II, pp.490-494.

35) SEMERANO, *Le Origini*, I, p.319 ff. ("Motivi religiosi dell'India e dell'antico Iran"), cf. II, p.xvii ff.

36) GALIBERTI, Review; cf. SEMERANO, *Le Origini*, I, p.vii, for a reference to Galilei.

37) P. MATTHIAE, *Ebla. Un Impero Ritrovato*, Bari 1970, *passim*. But cf. also the periodical *Studi Eblaiti* since 1970 onwards, and the works of one of the most skillful members of the Italian archaeological staff, the assyriologist G. PETTINATO: see in particular his "L'Atlante Geografico del Vicino Oriente Antico attestato ad Ebla e ad Abù Salàbih", *Orientalia* 47 1978), pp.52-4, for the mention of Harràn amongst the sites recorded in Ebla's Archive documents (the text in question is the no. TM.75.G.1591); cf. F.M. FALES, "Harràn. Fonti e Studi sull'Età Preamorrea", in *Studi su Harràn. Quaderni del Seminario di Iranistica, Uralo-Altaistica e Caucasologia dell'Università di Venezia*, VI, Venezia 1979, p.13 f. As already A. METZ, *Die Stadt Harràn bis zum Einfall der Araber*, Strasburg 1892, p.24, knew, the name of the city derives from Accadian *kharrànu(m)*, "way, road, journey, caravan etc.": I.G. GELB - B. LANDESBERGER - A.L.

OPPENHEIM, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, VI, pp.106b-113b; cf. J.N. POSTGATE, art. "Harràn", *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, IV, pp.122b-125a; A. GOETZE, "An Old Babylonian Itinerary", *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 7 (1953), pp.51-72. For an imaginary etymology from Hebrew *hor* = "hole, cave etc.", see PHILO, *Migr.*, 188: *Kharràn gàr ermeneùetai trògle*.

38) J. PEDERSEN, "The Sabians", pp.383-391; J. HJARPE, *Analyse Critique des Traditions Arabes sur les Sabéens Harràniens*, Diss. Uppsala 1972, p.138 ff.; cf. SEGAL, "The Sabian Misteries", p.214 f. and Id., *Edessa*, p.60 n.1. See the critical remarks raised by TARDIEU, "Sàbiens", p.8 n.28, p.9 and p.11.

39) AL-ZAMAKHSHARI, *Al-Kashshàf*, ed. Beirut 1386 H./1996 I, p.660 (Comm. ad *Qur'ân* 5, 69); cf. J.D. Mc AULIFFE, "Exegetical Identification of the Sàbi'ùn", *MW* 72 (1971), pp.95-106. De BLOIS' opinion that "the question of which reading is correct has no real bearing on the etymology" ("Sabians in Arabia", p.51 n.4) seems to us rather doubtful.

40) See for example GUNDUZ, *The Knowledge of Life*, where most of the Muslim traditional sources are collected; opportunely the author maintains that the only difference between these verbs "is that the *hamzah* in the former appears as long *à* in the latter" (p.18).

41) The basic value of phisical motion common to both verbs "to change, to come out, to return, to incline, to turn over", not seldom taken in a religious sense, *i.e.* "to leave one's religion (for another), to apostatize, to convert" - which is certainly the most interesting one and will therefore be observed more in particular below - is sometimes used in relation to the "rise of a star" or to "the return of a camel" in the case of *saba'a/yasba'u* (imp.) (AL-TABARI, *Jami' al-bayàn 'an tawil ày al-Qur'ân*, ed. Cairo 1388 H./1968³, I, p.318 f.; AL-ZAMAKHSHARI, *Asàs al-balàghah*, ed. Beirut 1385 H./1965, p.345), whereas *sabà/yasbù* (imp.) may also mean "to quarrel, to wrangle, to squabble": the fact does not fail to be recorded for example by AL-BIRUNI (*Chronology*, p.314) in order to put evidently the Harràniens - as Muslim authors sistematically do when writing about them since the III H./IX c. C.E. onwards - in a bad light: "They do not agree among themselves on any subject, wanting a solid ground upon which to base their religion, such as direct or indirect divine revelation or the like".

42) "The pre-Islamic poetry - as J. SPENCER TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, London 1979, p.246 n.3, states - was preserved only in collections formed during the early 'Abbasid period by Muslim scholars, mainly non-Arab ... They were obsessed by an endeavour to draw a veil over the Arabs' historical past which they designated as the *Jàhiliyya*, and edited and moulded the poems to suit their particular aims".

43) Before the rise of Islam, "there was no role for Arabic. The reason was the peripheral nature of Arabic. Except in south-west Arabia, the Arab was always transitional ... Only special circumstances, the fact that Arabic was the language of the Prophet Muhammad, freed it, so that it could become the literary vehicle of the complex culture of Islam" (*Ibidem*, p.224). It should perhaps be stressed that the *Qur'ân* was transcribed in an Arabic form able to be read many years after Muhammad's life. On the beginnings it was "pratiquement illisible pour qui ne le savait par coeur. Il a fait sa première apparition à Siffin (657) ... Trente ans plus tard, on a tâché, à Coufa, de le rendre lisible en lui ajoutant des points diacritiques" (F. NAU, *Les Arabes Chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie*, Paris 1933, p.99).

44) For a complete survey of the relative evidence, see A.J. WENSINCK, *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane*, Paris 1933, p.231 f. s.v. *sabà*.

45) J. WELLHAUSEN, *Reste Arabischen Heidenthums*, Berlin 1897², pp.236 f.

46) See for example the episode recorded more than once by AL-BUKHARI, *Al-jàmi' al-sahih*, VIII, Istanbul 1981, p.118: when Khàlid ibn Wàlid called them to become Muslims, the people of Bani Jazimah cried out "*saba'na, saba'na*", instead of saying correctly "*aslamna*", "we (want to) become Muslims". We do not translate the former verb now, because we shall return to this point below p.32 f. and n. 282 ff.

47) With few interesting exceptions. In relation to first Muslim proselytes, IBN HISHAM, *Sira Rasul Allàh*, ed. F. WUSTENFELD, I, Goettingen 1860, p.300, narrates for instance the following story: once, some people had all pledged themselves, when Satan shouted from the top of al-'Aqaba: "O people of the stations of Minà, do you want this reprobate [*Mudhamman*: probably an offensive counterpart to the name Muhammad] and the *Subà(t)* who are with him?". *Subà(t)* is an unusual collective plural of *Sàbi'*, to be

understood as “one who had given up his own religion to take another”, instead of “apostate” (*murtadd*), which is a quite common translation of the term in spite of its bad approximation (ET by A. GUILLAUME, *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Ibn Ishàq's Sirat Rasùl Allàh*, London-New York 1955, p.205 n.2).

48) See for example the following account by IBN HANBAL, *Musnad*, III, ed. Beirut (n.d.) p.492: “Rabî’a(h) ibn ‘Ubbàd said: ‘I saw the prophet when he was a pagan. He was saying to people <If you want to save yourselves, accept there is no god but Allàh>. At this moment I noticed a man behind him, saying <He is a *Sàbi*’ >. When I asked somebody who he was, he told me he was Abù Lahab, his uncle”.

49) D.S. MARGOLIOUTH, art. “Harrànians”, *ERE* (ed. J. HASTINGS), VI, Edinburgh 1913, p.519; cf. HJARPE, *Les Sabéens Harràniens*, p.26.

50) Cf. the famous quotation by AL-TABARI, op. cit., I, p.319: “The Politheists used to say of the Prophet and his Companions: ‘These are the Sabians’, comparing them to them”. Cf. ABU ‘L-FARAJ AL-ISFAHANI, *Kitàb al-Aghànì*, ed. Bulàk 1285 H./1868, p.138, where Muhammad is charged of having mingled the Sabians’ Religion with the “Najd Tables”: the meaning of the latter expression is still obscure.

51) E.W. LANE, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, repr. New-York 1955, I, 1, p.361 ff.

52) J. BARTH, *Wurzeluntersuchungen zum Hebraischen und Aramaischen Lexicon*, Leipzig 1902, p.48 f.

53) Among the relevant studies there are the following quite old ones: E. PREUSCHEN, “Die Bedeutung von *shùbh shebùth* im Alten Testament”, *ZAV* 15 (1895), pp.1-74; E.L. DIETRICH “*Shùbh Shebùth*. Die Endzeitliche Wiederherstellung bei den Propheten”, *BZAV* (Giessen 1925), pp.1-66; E. BAUMANN, “*Shùbh shebùth*. Eine exegetische Untersuchung”, *ZAW* 47 (1929), pp.17-44; E. DIETRICH *Die Umkehr (Bekehrung und Busse) im Alten Testament und im Judentum* (Diss. University of Tubingen), Stuttgart 1936; and above all W. L. HOLLADAY, *The Root Shùbh in the Old Testament*, Leiden 1958.

54) See AL-TABARI, op. cit., I, p.318; IBN MANZUR, *Lisàn al-‘Arab*, ed. Beirut (c. 1975), I, p.108; AL-QURTUBI, *Al-jamì’ al-ahkàm al-Qur’àn*, ed. Cairo 1387 H./1967, I, p.434; FAKHRUDDIN AL-RADI, *Mafàtih al-ghayb*, ed. Istanbul 1307 H./1889, I, p.548; AL-NAYSABURI, *Gharàyb al-Qur’àn wa raghàyb al-furqàn*, ed. Cairo 1381 H./1962, I, p. 333.

55) Needless to insist upon the importance of the role, also political, played by the Christian Arab Dynasty of Ghassan as well as by the Lakhmids of al-Hira in relation to Bizantium and Persia respectively (we shall discuss the phenomenon of Anchorite and. Monastic movement later on). However, as SPENCER TRIMINGHAM states, even if “it is true that nomad Arab leaders like Hârith ibn Jabala made a mark in Christian history, ... there is not the slightest hint that Arabs felt any urge to express their faith through an Arab medium. Here we may reflect upon the reasons why no indigenous Arab Church came into being” (*Christianity among the Arabs*, p.308).

56) We continue to follow TRIMINGHAM’s arguments: “... among the nomad tribes of the interior of the peninsula Christianity was no more than a surface influence ... Although Allàh as supreme God was universally known, He was only marginally the direct focus of cultic worship” (*Ibidem*, p.250). Even NAU, *Les Arabes Chrétiens*, who is inclined to overrate somehow a Christian influence upon Muhammad’s thought, must acknowledge “nous n’avons pas de documents syriaques [nor other ones!] sur le Hidjàz” (p.122).

57) “Arabic had been written for centuries in a variety of scripts, those of Thamùd, Lihyàn, and Safà made use of the south-Arabian script, yet Christian Arabs found no role for it in relation to their beliefs” (TRIMINGHAM, op. cit., p.226).

58) P. AUBIN in his *Le problème de la Conversion. Etude sur un term commun à l’Hellénisme et au Christianisme des trois premières siècles*, Paris 1953, pp.34-6, maintains that Yahwé and Israel turn reciprocally each other: that is the most important tract of the *Old Testament* concept of Conversion. See however also the articles “‘Apostasy and Apostates from Judaism” and “Conversion to Christianity”, *JE*, s. vs.

59) See HOLLADAY, *The Root Shùbh*, p. 53 (“The Central Meaning of *Shùbh*”): “The verb *shùbh*, in the *qal*, means: ‘being moved in a particular direction, to move thereupon in the opposite direction, the implication being (unless there is evidence of the contrary) that one will arrive again at the initial point of departure’ ”.

60) We cannot deepen here the problems linked to the historical phenomenon of Jewish Proselytism (as M. SIMON, *Verus Israel* Paris 1948, ET by H. Mc KEATING, *Verus Israel. A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)*, Oxford 1986, p.271, wrote, “in the history of Judaism around the beginning of the Christian era there is no more controversial question than that of proselytism”), and thus we do not distinguish “among the nuances involved in organized, active missionary activities by Jews, readiness by Jews to accept converts but without active measures to do so, [and] grudging acceptance of converts” (L. H. FELDMAN, “Proselytism by Jews in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Centuries”, *JSS* 24 (1993), p.1). For a general survey, see K. G. KUHN - H. STEGEMANN, art. “Proselyten”, *RE*, Suppl. Vol. IX, col.1248 ff.; K.G. KUHN, art. “Proselytos”, *TDNT* VI (1968) cols.727-44; A. PAUL, art. “Proselyte, prosélitisme”, *DB* Suppl. VIII (1962), cols.1353-6. Selected bibliography: A. BERTHOLET, *Die Stellung der Israeliten und der Juden zu den Fremden*, Freiburg 1896; A. von HARNACK, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, 2 Vols., ET London 1904-5; J. JUSTER, *Les Juifs dans l’ Empire Romain*, I, Paris 1914, p.253 ff.; F.M. DERWACHTER, *Preparing the Way for Paul. The Proselyte Movement in Later Judaism*, London 1930, p.324 ff.; LAKE, “Proselytes and God-Fearers” (ref. above n. 2); B.J. BAMBERGER, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period*, Cincinnati 1939 (= New-York 1968); W. G. BRAUDE, *Jewish Proselyting in the First Five Centuries of the Common Era: the Age of Tannaism and Amoraim*, Providence 1940, considering however the critical remarks raised by FELDMAN, op. cit., p.2 n. 3); SIMON, *Verus Israel*, pp.334-51 and pp.482-8; Idem, “Sur le Début du Prosélytisme Juive”, in A. CAQUOT - M. PHILONENKO eds., *Hommages à André Dupont-Sommer*, Paris 1971, pp.509-20; Stanley B. HOENIG, “Conversion during the Talmudic Period”, in D.M. EICHHORN ed., *Conversion to Judaism: A History and Analysis*, New-York 1965; SCHURER-VERMES-MILLAR-GOODMAN, *The History of the Jewish People*, pp.150-77. Add. A.T. KRAABEL, “The Diaspora Synagogue: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence since Sukenik”, *ANRW*, II, 19.1, pp. 477-510 (= D. URMAN - P.V.M. FLESHER eds., *Ancient Synagogues*, Leiden-NewYork-Koln 1995, I, pp.95-126; M. GOODMAN, “Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century”, in J. LIEU - J. NORTH - T. RAJAK, *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, London-New York 1992, pp.53-78; Idem, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1994. TREBILCO’s *Jewish Communities*, is a fundamental reference for Asia Minor’s particular landscape, as well as LEVINSKAYA’s *The Book of Acts*, for the general setting during the 1st century C.E.

61) That is the title of a brilliant article of Shaye J.D. COHEN, published onto *HTR* 82.1 (1989), pp.13-33. The author rightly insists on the fact that “God-worshippers” could not follow in the course of many centuries and within a variety of geographical situations a fixed single pattern of religious practise and belief, but only a loose one. Cohen methodologically divides people showing sympathy for Judaism in seven categories: people who did it by 1) admiring some aspect of this religion; 2) acknowledging the power of the god of the Jews by incorporating him into a pagan pantheon; 3) benefiting the Jews or being conspicuously friendly to Jews; 4) practising some or many of the rituals of the Jews; 5) venerating the god of the Jews and denying or ignoring the pagan gods; 6) joining the Jewish community; 7) converting to Judaism and ‘becoming a Jew’; those whose behaviour fitted the categories 2-5 could be called “God-Fearers” (so, for instance, Cornelius – a model of God-fearer – described by Luke in *Acts* 10, can be described as belonging to categories 2-4, but not the fifth, since, as a roman centurion, he participated in a pagan cult [p.111]).

62) Cf. the usual definition in general terms of the God-Fearers: “They are to be understood as a group of pagans who attended the synagogue regularly and adopted some Jewish customs such as Sabbath observance and food laws but who were not circumcised and so were not full members of the Jewish community in the way that proselytes were” (TREBILCO, *Jewish Communities*, p.145). But see also A. M. RABELLO, “L’ Observance des Fêtes Juives dans l’ Empire Romain” *ANRW* II, 21.2, pp.1288-1312. JOSEPHUS’ opinion about the spread of Jewish customs among Roman Empire’s population is well known (“The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances, and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, not a single nation to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed”, *Contra Apionem*, II, 39, 282); PHILO, *Vita Mosis*, 2, 17 ff., seems to agree with him at least about the popularity of Jewish rituals (“Who has not shown his [of the Jewish people] respect for that sacred seventh day, by giving rest and relaxation from labour to himself and his neighbours, not to free men only but to slaves too, and beyond this to his beasts?”). For the evidence connected with our main theme, cf. R.

MARCUS, "The Sebomenoi in Josephus", *JSS* 14 (1952), pp.247-50; see also "Respect for Judaism by Gentiles According to Josephus", *HTR* 80.4 (1987), pp.409-30, especially p.419 f., by D. COHEN.

63) It is perhaps worth while fixing here some general points: "In modern languages the term 'proselyte' and its derivative with an active meaning – 'proselytism', 'to proselytize' - are used to denote a non-Jewish adherent of Judaism and the practice of making proselytes. This word is a transliteration of the Greek *proselytos* which in turn was coined in a Jewish milieu to render the Hebrew *ger* (ebr.). In the OT the word denoted a class of resident aliens, and so described a social reality. But gradually, due to the fact that the resident aliens had certain religious obligations and became integrated into the community of Israel, the concept acquired religious connotations. The date of the change is uncertain but it is usually assumed that by the first century A.D. *proselytos* meant 'prolelyte'. The starting point for those who see Judaism of the Second Temple Period in terms of a mission is a demographic shift – dramatic population changes among the Jews in Palestine and the Diaspora are attributed partially to the great number of proselytes. Harnack counted as many as four to four and half million Jews within the Roman Empire. Juster's estimation was even higher – about six or seven million. Baron's figure for the middle of the first century A.D. was eight million, one-eighth of the whole population of the Roman Empire, as he thought ... But though these high estimates of the Jewish population must be treated with caution, there is no doubt that the size of the Jewish Diaspora was substantial and there was a certain growth in population. This is confirmed by both literary evidence and archaeological data" (LEVINSKAYA, *The Book of Acts*, p.22 f.). We shall analyse more in detail the Hebrew equivalent for "proselyte", i.e. *ger*; for the moment, we want to remember that also the term "Jew" – in addition to KRAABEL's interpretation of the word as a geographical indicator proposed by him in the already quoted (above n. 9) article "The Roman Diaspora" (1982) – "may also indicate pagan adherence to Judaism": see R.S. KRAEMER, "On the Meaning of the Term 'Jew' in Greco-Roman Inscriptions", *HTR* 82.1 (1989), pp.35-53.

64) See G. BERTRAM, art. "*Epistrèpho, epistrophè*" *TWNT* VII, cols. 722-9; E. BEHM, art. "*Metanoèò, metànoia*" (Greek, Hellen., Jew., Rabbin., Early Chr.), *TWNT* IV, cols. 972-6 and 985-1004; E. WURTHWEIN, art. "*Metanoèò, metànoia*", *TWNT* IV, cols.976-85.

65) Cf. the references quoted above, n. 53. Also the articles mentioned in the previous note may be used.

66) Oxford 1933 (repr. 1961). It is not by chance that NOCK reckons - beside the attraction of the Oriental Cults in Imperial times (the old and beautiful book of F. CUMONT, *Les Religions Orientales dans le Paganisme Romain*, Paris 1906, does not cease to be an universal reference-mark) among which Judaism and Christianity are obviously included, the Conversion to Philosophy as a relevant aspect of the general phenomenon studied by him (chap. 11, *passim*). We shall return to that (see below, p.35 f. and notes).

67) NOCK, op. cit., p.vii. NOCK's article "Bekehrung", *RAC*, s.v., is a good introduction to the matter; see also G. BASTIDE, *La Conversion Spirituelle*, Paris 1966. The bibliographical relevance of the author's "The Guild of Zeus Hysistos" (ref. above, n.2), for the arguments which we are carrying on is out of discussion.

68) NOCK, *Conversion*, chap.1, *passim*. Shaye J.D. COHEN, "Respect for Judaism by Gentiles according to Josephus", *HTR* 80.4 (1987), pp. 409-30 discusses Nock's distinction between Conversion and Adhesion by the particular point of view of Josephus' writings.

69) For Greek and Latin technical expressions = "God-Fearers" see below, p. 25 f.

70) SIEGERT, op. cit. (above n.2), p.110 n.1 and pp.147-51, FELDMAN, op. cit. (above n.2 and n.7), ROBERT, op. cit. (above n.2), pp.40-5, and USTINOVA, op. cit. (above n.4), p.203, are among the authors who prefer to use just this term. TREBILCO, *Jewish Communities*, p. 246 n. 1, rightly preferring "God-Worshipper" to "God-Fearer" (cf. above, n.3), employs "Simpathizer" as it follows: "I will use the term 'simpathizer' for those who were favourably disposed towards Judaism and/or Jewish communities and perhaps followed some Jewish customs but did not adopt a regular relationship with the synagogue community".

71) The term was introduced by NOCK, *Conversion*, chap.I; cf. COHEN, "Respect for Judaims", p.410: "I use the terms 'adherents' (and 'adherence') in the sense established for them by A. D. Nock". Cf. also below, p. 22 f.

72) Cf. above, n.62 and below, n.180. For the relation lamps lighting - *Theòs Hypsistos*' cult, cf. MITCHELL, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos" (ref. above, n. 4), p. 91: "Lamps and fire were essential to a cult which was associated with the upper air of heaven and with the sun", with numerous archaeological and epigraphic references. For a Northern African lamp witnessing Caelicolae's piety (about whom see below, p.27 and ns. 236-8), cf. M. SIMON, "Un Document du Syncretisme Religieux dans l'Afrique Romaine", *CRAI*, (Jan.-Mar.) 1978, Paris, pp.500-24. For an exhaustive survey of the Jewish customs by which Gentiles were mostly attracted, cf. FELDMAN, "Proselytes and 'Sympathizers'", p.290 ff.

73) The archaeological, epigraphic and literary evidence about the cult of *Theòs Hypsistos* - to which we link the historical phenomenon of God-Fearers (see above, n.4) -, by both sides of the inter-related technical expressions and of personal onomastics, ranges since Hellenistic Age till to the Fifth century C. E.: for a whole survey of the evidence see MITCHELL, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos", pp. 128-148; cf. USTINOVA, *The Supreme Gods of the Bosporan Kingdom*, pp.183-287 (or her previous work "The Thiasoi of Theos Hypsistos in Tanais", *HTR* 31 [1991], pp.150-80), whose conclusions, though, are far from being convincing.

74) Certainly SIEGERT, "Gottesfurchtige und Symphatisanten", was one of the first scholars to understand in such terms the religious phenomenon in question: see pp. 140-7 ("Das Problem des Monotheismus").

75) So, for example, nobody among the many scholars being present at the famous international congress about *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo. Colloquio di Messina 13-8 Aprile 1966 (The Origins Of Gnosticism. Colloquium of Messina 13th-18th April 1966)*, Suppl. Vol.12 to *Numen*, Leiden 1967, Texts and Discussions published by U. BIANCHI, durst to use the expression "Pagan Monotheism".

76) Cf. NOCK, *Conversion*, chap. I, for the difference Prophetic Religions – Traditional Religions.

77) Actually, in the religious sphere of the Graeco-Roman world the term has a wide breadth of usage, including concepts as well-being, bodily health, deliverance and preservation: see *TWNT*, VII, cols.965-9.

78) NOCK, *Conversion*, mostly chaps. III and VI-VIII. Cf. CUMONT, *Les Religions Orientales dans l'Empire Romain*, *passim*. In the last decades the important collection *Etudes Preliminaires aux Religions dans l'Empire Romain* [EPRO], published at Leiden by E.J. Brill and directed by M.J. VERMASEREN, is carrying on a serious work of scientific information about and beyond that subject never tried in the past.

79) NOCK, *Conversion*, chap II. R. REITZENSTEIN's *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*, Leipzig-Berlin 1927, is still an important reference mark.

80) M. YOURCENAR, *Mémoires d'Adrien*, Paris 1951.

81) Cf. H: MATTINGLY and R:A:G: CARSON, *Coins of the Roman Empire in British Museum*, [Augustus to Balbinus and Papienus] 6 voll., London 1923-1962, *passim*; for Greek coins see, for example R.S. POOLE, *Catalogue of the Coins of Alexandria and the Nomes*, London 1892, *passim*.

82) See MATTINGLY, *op. cit.*, IV, London 1940 sub Antonius Pius (pp.1-384) and Commodus (pp.689-849); for Greek coins see POOLE, *op. cit.*, sub Antonius Pius (pp.108-146) and Commodus (pp.173-180).

83) See MATTINGLY-CARSON, *op. cit.*, V, *passim* and for Greek coins POOLE, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

84) "According to Cassius Dio Marcus, Aurelius showed himself to be *theosebès* by even sacrificing at home on days when no public business was done [CASSIO DIO, *Hist. Rom.* LXXII.34.2], while that Emperor himself rates the 'fear of God' alongside holiness and justice as the ultimate goals of reason [MARCUS AURELIUS, *Medit.*, XI.20.2]" (LIEU, "The Race of the God-Fearers", *cit. above* n.7, p.492). It is particularly interesting JUSTIN's idea of combining *eusebeia* and *philosophia* as a sort of self-evident rule for realizing the political ideal of the philosopher-ruler typical of his times: "reason dictates that those who are in truth *god-fearing* and *philosophers* should honour and love the truth alone" (*Apology*, 2, 1-2; 3, 2; 12, 5; II *Apol.*, 15, 2); cf. H. HOLFELDER, "*Eusebeia* und *philosophia*. Literarische Einheit und politischer Kontext von Justin Apologie", *ZNW* 68 (1977), pp.48-66 and 231-51. For Philosophy as a widespread form of Conversion in imperial times see NOCK, *Conversion*, chap. XI.

85) See the arts. “*Theosèbeia, theosebès*” and “*Eusèbeia, eusebès*”, by G. BERTRAM, R. BULTMANN and W. FOERSTER, *TWNT*, III, cols.124-8, cols. 749-51 and VII, cols.169-89. Cf. NOCK, *Conversion*, chap. I.

86) NOCK, *Conversion*, chap. XI. Cf. FOERSTER, art. “*Eusebèia, eusebès*”, in particular col.177, with the interesting equivalence *eusèbeia – dhamma* (Sanskrit *dharma*), “buddhist doctrine of salvation” (actually “law”) showed by the Asoka Greek inscription in Kandahar (*ibid.* n.14). Actually the concept of *eusebès/eusebèia* includes respect due to the god(s), respect to family and state, and appropriate behaviour and attitude.

87) See for example POOLE, *op. cit.*, p.118 f., no.1010 ff.

88) For a general survey see SCHURER-VERMES-MILLAR-GOODMAN, *The History of the Jewish People*, I, p. 537 ff.

89) See E. Mary SMALLWOOD, *The Jews under Roman Rule: from Pompey to Domitian*, (*SJLA* 20) Leiden 1976; cf. for example COHEN, “Respect for Judaism”, p.412 ff. (“Tolerant Monarchs and Dignitaries”).

90) E. Mary SMALLWOOD, “The Legislation of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius against Circumcision”, *Latomus* 18 (1959), pp. 334-47 and 20 (1961) pp. 93-6. “According to *Historia Augusta (Vita Hadriani 14.2)* - FELDMAN (“Proselytism by Jews in the 3rd-5th ccs.”, p. 5) writes - it was the ban on circumcision which provoked the Jews under Bar Kochba in 132 to revolt against the Romans. But it should be noted that the decree (MODESTINUS, *Digest* 48.8.11) by Hadrian’s successor, Antoninus Pius, permitting circumcision specifically states that it is permitted to Jews to circumcise their sons; it would appear that the permission did not extend to the circumcision of non-Jewish converts to Judaism”. SIMON, *Verus Israel*, p.290-1, states that, of the privileges guaranteed by the Emperors to the Jews, only the right to propagate their faith was withdrawn by Christian Emperors from them, but actually such restrictions were placed upon the Jews by Septimius Severus already (*Historia Augusta, Severus*, 17.1: cf. M. STERN ed., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, II, Jerusalem 1980, # 515, p.625). Graeco-Roman and Christian literature display the importance of circumcision for men’s conversion, cf. J. J. COLLINS, “A Symbol of Otherness: Circumcision and Salvation in the First Century”, in NEUSNER-FRERICHS eds., *To See Ourselves as Others See Us*, pp.163-86. Needless to say, women – among whom even before Antoninus’ time conversions to Judaism were much more numerous than among men (cf. JOSEPHUS, *Bel. Jud.*, II, 559-61) - escaped any penalty, as A. Mordecai RABELLO opportunely suggests (“The Legal Condition of the Jews in the Roman Empire”, *ANRW*, II, 13, Berlin 1980, p. 698). The literature about female converts to Jewish faith is abundant: for a well-documented survey cf. COHEN, “Respect for Judaism”, p.409 n.1. For slaves’ conversion, cf. again FELDMAN, “Proselytism”, pp.14-8. For the general subject, see the excellent collection, translation and analysis of the texts by A. LINDER ed., *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, Detroit 1987; cf. LIEU-NORTH-RAJAK eds. *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, p.116 ff.

91) The problem of the Imperial Legislation’s practical consequences upon Jewish Proselytism is rather complex: according to some scholars, since that moment Judaism withdrew into itself, cf. RABELLO, *ibidem* (“Under the Christian Emperors, Judaism, unable to acquire converts, was compelled to withdraw into itself”), or also M. O. DUCHESNE, *Early History of the Christian Church, from its Foundations to the End of the Fifth Century*, ET by C. JENKINS, London 1908, p. 412: “The religious life now became very narrow. The day of liberal Jews, who conquered with hellenism and with the government, was past and gone for good. There is no longer any desire to stand well with other nations, nor to make proselytes. That field is left to Nazarenes. The Jews retired within themselves, absorbed in the contemplation of the law”. FELDMAN’s opinion (“Proselytism by Jews in the 3rd-5th ccs.”, p. 58) appears somewhat different, and more interesting for us: “Even before the official triumph of Christianity ... the number of ‘sympathizers’ ... grew, perhaps because of the increased severity of the punishment for converts”. Cf. also REYNOLDS-TANNENBAUM, *Jews and God-Fearers*, p.45: “That there are only three full proselytes [recorded by Aphrodisia’s stele] ... might seem to indicate that to become one was in fact an unusual, therefore probably a risky, step to take in Aphrodisia”.

92) A clear indication of non-enforcement of the law comes from the increasing severity of punishment showed by the imperial legislation in the next centuries, which evidently had no actual consequences: laws, still insisting on prohibiting conversion to Judaism and circumcision of non-Jews, such as those issued by Emperors Honorius and Theodosius II in 415 and 423 C.E. (*Codex Theodosianus* 16.8.22 and 16.8.26: see C. PHARR, *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions. A Translation with*

Commentary, Glossary and Bibliography, New-York 1969; text and translation also in A. LINDER, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, edited with Introductions, Translations and Commentary, ET Detroit 1987), or the other, even more severe, one issued by Emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III (*Novella* 3, *Breviarium* 3) are just some examples of that: it is worth noting, moreover, that all these legal measures were later included in Justinian's *Corpus*. FELDMAN's analysis, op. cit., mostly pp.4-14 ("Roman Imperial Legislation") and pp.19-22 ("Non-enforcement of Imperial Laws"), is on the whole subscribed by us. Cf. REYNOLDS-TANNENBAUM, op. cit., p.44: "The law ... was often broken with impunity, and was obviously difficult to enforce under ancient conditions"

93) See the collection, translation and commentary of the texts in questions by S. KRAUSS, *Antoninus und der Rabbi*, Wien 1910, or, for a short account, *JE*, I, p.656. It is difficult to evaluate the literary evidence (*Talmud, Sanhedrin* 91a-b; *Jerusalem Talmud, Shevi'ith* 6.1.36d; cf. *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 20.6 *et alibi*) referring the close friendship between the Jewish Patriarch of Palestine at the end of the 2nd c., Rabbi Judah the Prince, and a Roman Emperor called "Antoninus" having such a profound respect for Judaism that, according to the Rabbis, he will be the first righteous proselyte in the Messianic Era (*Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah*, 3.2.74a).

94) Even if we maintain that the *Theòs Hypsistos*' cult does not necessarily imply Jewish influence (cf. above, n.4), it does not mean that the Jewish religious culture had not been the main cause for popularity of *Theòs Hypsistos* as a title: see F. CUMONT, "Les Mystères de Sabazius et le Judaïsme", *CRAIBL* 1906, p.73; J. KEIL, "Die Kulte Lydiens", in W. H. BUCKLER - W. M. CALDER eds., *Anatolian Studies Presented to Sir William Mitchell Ramsay*, Manchester 1923, p.263; C. CLEMEN, *Religionsgeschichtliche Erklärung des Neun Testament*, Berlin 1924², p.60; A. B. COOK, *Zeus. A Study in Ancient Religion*, II, 2, p.889; G. KITTEL, "Das kleinasiatische Judentum in der hellenistischen-romischen Zeit. Ein Bericht zur Epigraphic Kleinasiens", *ZTL* 69 (1944), col.16; R. Mc L. WILSON, *The Gnostic Problem. A Study of the Relations between Hellenistic Judaism and the Gnostic Heresy*, London 1958, p.13; S. SAFRAI - M. STERN, *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum. Section One. The Jewish People in the First Century. Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions*, I, Assen 1974, p.157, II, 1976, p.712; S. SANIE, "Deus Aeternus et Theos Hypsistos en Dacie Romaine", in M. B. De BOER - T. A. EDRIDGE eds., *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren*, EPRO 68, Leiden 1978, pp. 1108, 1111-2; for a modified version of this view see A. R. R. SHEPPARD, "Pagan Cults of Angels in Asia Minor", *Talanta* 12-13 (1980-1981), p.94; cf. also TATSCHJEVA-HITOVA, "Dem Hypsistos geweihte Denkmäler in Thrakien" (ref. above, n.4), pp.271-4..

95) See below, p.15 f. and notes.

96) For Constantine's conversion see the brilliant and convincing study of P. WEISS, "Die Vision Costantins", *Festschrift A. Heuss*, (Frankfurter Historische Studien 13), Frankfurt 1993, pp.143-69. For the possibility that the Emperor before his conversion to Christianity (if such it was) was a *Theòs Hypsistos*' worshipper, cf. MITCHELL, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos", p.124 f. ("An eastern Costantine might have started as a Hypsistarian").

97) Though we are not able to fix the identity of the "Antoninus" mentioned in Talmudic and Midrashic texts, there are however many Roman Emperors showing special sympathy and regard for Judaism: for a short but exhaustive survey cf. FELDMAN, "Proselytes and Symphatizers", pp.269-71 ("The Favoured Political Position of the Jews"). For the reliability of *Historia Augusta*'s account of Severans' attitude towards the Jews, see G. GAGER, "The Dialogue of Paganism with Judaism: since Bar Kochba to Julian", *HUCA* 44 (1973), p.96.

98) Though the word appears quite seldom in the Apostolic Fathers, see for example *2 Clem.*, 19.4, where *ho eusebès* is used as a close synonymous for "Christian". However, "... the adjective *eusebès* ... was increasingly taken over to describe their own faith by Christians" (MITCHELL, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos", p.119 n.126). For the Jewish context we may follow a brief but clear summary by LIEU, "The Race of the God-Fearers", p.497: "How far the choice of *theoseb-* rather than *euseb-* became a matter of conscious preference among Jews – as *Joseph and Aseneth* might suggest – must remain uncertain ... What does seem certain is that the terminology belongs to the religious claims and counter-claims of the period, with some roots in hellenistic and diaspora Judaism". G. BERTRAM's claim ("Der Begriff 'Religion' in der Septuaginta", *ZDMG* 12 [1934], pp.1-5) that both terms reflect the idea of hellenistic piety (as opposed to that of the *Old Testament*) arises from their relative infrequency in the *Septuagint*, except in *4 Maccabees* and, in the case of *eusebeia*, in the wisdom tradition; "On the whole the history of the term *theosèbeia*

displays the penetration into the Biblical sphere of a word group alien to the Biblical revelation; although criticizing its anthropocentric spiritual attitude, he nevertheless did recognize its significance in denoting ‘the true worship of God in contrast to pagan superstition and idolatry’” (Idem, op. cit. above n.85).

99) See again the arts. of FOERSTER, BERTRAM and BULTMANN cited above n.85. On *eusebès* see also L. ROBERT, *Hellenica. Recueil d'Epigraphie de Numismatique et d' Antiquités Grecques*, III, Paris 1946, p.81; Idem, *Nouvelles Inscriptions de Sardes*, p.44; and in general M. N. TOD, “Laudatory Epithets in Greek Epitaphs”, *ABSA* 46, pp.182-90. The term occurs in only one known Jewish inscription, *CIJ* 683 from Stobi, but on literary level the situation – has we have said in the previous note – is quite different.

100) “Whereas pagan inscriptions are apt to celebrate their honorand as ‘pious’ (*eusebès*), the claim that he or she was *theosebès* seems to have monopolized by the Jews” (LIEU, “The Race of the God-Fearers”, p.493). So at Sardis, for example, six donors of the mosaics decorating the synagogue proudly proclaim to be *theosebeis* (ROBERT, *Nouvelles Inscriptions*, *passim*). According to BERTRAM, art. “Theosèbeia, theosebès”, in *LXX*, Philo, Josephus and the *Pseudepigrapha* the term is generally used for denoting Jews’ piety and their faith to *Yahweh* as well as for distinguishing them from the uncircumcised. The same is true for epigraphic material (most of the studies about God-Fearers quoted above, n.4, reproduce these inscriptions and documents). For a list of those who have thought that *theosebès* was a Jewish technical term see SIEGERT, “Gottesfurchtige und Sympathisanten”, p.155 and n.3.

101) For *Theosebèstatos* as a honorary title, cf. PREISIGTE, *Worterbuch*, III, p.190 (quoted by BERTRAM, op. cit., p.127 n.4). For the increasing use of these epithets by the Christians writers for apologetic reasons, see LIEU, “The Race of the God-Fearers”, p.493 ff., where the author shows the strong historical conflict with the Jews for the claim of being the only representatives of the true piety (which word, by the time, was rendered in Greek more and more frequently by the term *Theosèbeia* rather than by *Eusèbeia*), since the 2nd century C.E. onwards: “Both groups were making the same claim in a context of accusations or persecution ... Both, too, were refusing the title to their opponents and claiming it for themselves” (p.501).

102) MITCHELL, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos”, p.119. Cf. REYNOLDS-TANNENBAUM, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisia*, p.96, according to whom “a degree of piety” seems to be involved by the names derived from *theos*– (Theòdotos, Theòdoros, Theòphilos) and in the name Eusèbios (*et similia*, we should add).

103) Most of these names are recorded by H. WUTHNOW, *Die semitischen Menschennamen in griechischen Inschriften und Papyri des vorderen Orient* (*SEP*, I, 4), Leipzig 1930, pp.99-100 and 162. Cf. however also M. PAPE’s *Worterbuch des griechischen Eigennamen*, (Braunschweig 1863-70), PREISIGTE’s *Namenbuch*, D. FORABOSCHI’s *Supplement to Preisigte’s Lexicon*, P. M. FRASER - E. MATTHEWS *et alii*, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, I, Oxford 1987, and IIIA, 1997, s.vs.

104) For *Theosebès* as a personal name see M. CROSBY, “Greek Inscriptions: A Poletai Record of the Year 367/6 B.C.”, *Hesperia* 10 (1941), pp.14-20; other examples in *SEG* XV, no 818; XVI, no 478; XX, no 347 (*Thiosèbis*).

105) *Tzobeou*: P. L. GATIER, *Inscriptions de Jordanie*, II, *IGLS* XXI, p.67 f. (previously published also by J.T. MILIK, *SBF*, *LA* 10 [1959-60], p.177 f., with an oral communication by Bagatti): the inscription goes back to the years 717-8, and has been found on the floor of a church. For other examples see WUTHNOW, *Die Semitischen Menschennamen*, p.116.

106) MILIK, loc. cit., remarks that “à l’époque byzantine tardive on transcrit par ‘tz’ ou ‘ts’ soit le *sin* sémitique soit le *sadé*”.

107) WUTHNOW, *Die semitischen Menschennamen*, p.99 and p.162.

108) *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, s.v.

109) We record here some scholars’ opinions about the name *Sabah* as well as others closely linked to it just for showing the mutual contradictions which do not allow to maintain the truthfulness of this commonly accepted correspondence. BAGATTI, p.210 Pls. 13, 20; p.226 and p.227 note (point 4) (*Sabeos*): Christian Cemetery of Khirbet Samra, nos. 9 and 10: “9) *SABBEOS*, *Sabbéos* pourrait être pour *Sabbaios* ou *Sabaïos*, le *Sabéen*. D’autres préféreront sans doute y voire l’équivalent de *Sàbaos* très fréquent dans l’épigraphie

grecque de Syrie ...”; 10) “SABEOU, De Sàbeos. C’est une autre orthographe du mot précédent, mais cette fois au génitif”. CUMONT, *Fouilles de Dura-Europos*, 1922-3 (Texte 1926), p.302: “Zobaios [A, 29, Zobaïos; B, 27, Zobaïou], l’ ‘o’ et l’ ‘a’ étant souvent confondus dans la prononciation syrienne, est identique à Zabaïos = aram.*** (DUSSAUD-MACLER, *Régions Désertiques*, Inscr. Gr. 88, Saf. 88; *Princeton Exped.* Div. III, A, no214; cf. Zabéos, *ibid.* 787⁸; Sobaïos, 380, 633; Sobeòs, 173, 693, 709) ou Zabbaios (WADDINGTON, 2611 = DESSAU, *Inscr. Sel.*, 8807)”; *ibidem*, p.382 (no.20 l.3): “Zobaios = Sobaïos (parch. II, p.302)”; *ibidem*, p.419 (no. 68): “Zobion. On connaît de nombreux dérivés en *-ion* de noms sémitiques (Malchion, Zabdion etc.), soit qu’on ait donné une désinence grecque à une racine orientale, soit qu’en ait ajouté à un nom en *i* (Zabdi, Malchi) la terminaison arameénne du diminutif ‘*òn*’ (CLERMONT-GANNEAU, *Recueil*, IV, p.114; LIDZBARSKY, *Ephem.*, I, p.218, II, pp.80, 338). – Un Séleukos Zobònos est nommé dans PRENTICE, 147, qui en rapproche le noms arameéns ?”. *Princeton Expedition to Syria*, III (Greek and Latin Inscriptions) A (South Syria), Leiden 1907, by E. LITTMANN, p.120 no214 (Umm el-Kuttein): “Zabaïos ... *i.e.* Zabai, better Zabbai ... Zabbaios, WAD. 2611, is another transcription of the name”; *ibidem*, p.270 no.598: “... Sabaou Sabaos is very common”; *ibidem*, p.280 no623: “+ Sa]bbeos ... *i.e.* Shabbai The name Sabbeos may represent Sabbai, Sabbai (sad) or Shabbai. It is probably Shabbay, since aram.*** occurs in Nabataean, Palmyrene and Safaitic inscriptions; see LIDZBARSKY, *Ephemeris*, II, p.16”; *ibidem*, p.375 no783⁴: “... Sabàou of Sabàh”; *ibidem*, p.389 no. 787⁸: “... Zabeos is usually found in the form Zabaïos or Zabbaios; see no214”. Za[b]is, if our restoration is correct, is for Zabios, a form which occurs in a Jewish inscription from Rome, *CIG* 9903”; *ibidem*, p.187 no380: “(Umm idj-Djimàl, South Syria) ... [S]obaïou ... *i.e.* (daughter) of Subayh Sobaïos is the same as Sobeos; see no173 and WAD. 2046”; *ibidem*, p.101 no173: “... Sobeo[u] ... (son) of Subaih (or Subai’) ...”. H. I. BELL ed., *Jews and Christians in Egypt* (Illustrated by texts from Greek Papyri in the British Museum), p.23 l.18 (Claudius to the Alexandrines, Papyrus 1912, A.D. 41): “... Sabbionos”, p.30 n. ad loc.: “... Sambion and Sabbion are doubtless variant forms of the same name; for the second see JOSEPHUS, *Ant.*, XV, 47; *CIG* 2133C (Tauric Chersonese); for the first *CIG* 2130 (Anapa in Circassia); *IGR* I, 920 (Tanais). It should be Semitic, and though not found in PREISIGTE, *Namenb.*; ... it is no doubt connected with the common Sambàs, which again may be related to the names Sambathaios etc. (*Namenb.* col.524). There is, however, no reason to suppose that it was specially Jewish ...”.

110) V. TCHERIKOVER, “The Sambathions”, *CPJ* III, pp.43-56 (= *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 1 [1954], pp.78-98), cf. I, p.93 ff. The scholar states that the popularity of this name (= ‘Sabbath observer’) among Gentiles sympathizing for Judaism was due, at least on the beginnings, to their veneration of the seventh day of rest which – as we have already noted (above p.10 and n.71) – was one of the most striking features of the Judaic religion for the surrounding Pagan public (beside *Sambathion*, REYNOLDS-TANNENBAUM, *Jews and God-Fearers*, p.96, record at Aphrodisia another name probably referring to Jewish festivals, *i.e.* “*Eortàsios*”, because “this unspecified *eortè* ... is likely to be the Feast of Tabernacles”). We must recall here the goddess “Sambethe” (discovered by W. SCHULZE, *Kleine Schriften*, 1934, originally *Zeitschr. für vgl. Sprachforschung* [1895]), the Jewish Sybil with the same name (cf. RZACH, *RE*, zweite Reihe, II, col.2100 ff., s.v. “Sybillen”; V. NIKIPROWETZKY, “La Sybille Juive et le ‘Troisième Livre’ des ‘Pseudo-Oracles Sybillins’ depuis Charles Alexandre”, *ANRW* II, 20.1 [1987], pp.460-542) and the goddess “Sambathis” (cf. H. C. YOUTHIE, “Sambathis”, *HTR* 37 [1944], p.209 ff.), who occupy a certain space in Tcherikover’s study, as well as the conclusions of the relative discussion: “1) that the name of the Jewish Sybil is derived from Sabbath; 2) that no ancient oriental goddess was ever associated with her; 3) that, consequently, the only reason for pagans worshipping her must be sought in her name” (p.51). Even more important is the rise of a sect of Sabbath-observers in Egypt in Augustus’ time, the *synodos Sambatiké* of Naukratis (p.47), even if we do not know whether there was more than one, nor whether its members maintained any relations with the Synagogue: Tcherikover prefer “to call them simply pagan *observers of the Sabbath* whether this observance of a certain Jewish institution was connected with a deeper knowledge of the principles of Judaism, or not” (p.52 f.).

111) TCHERIKOVER, “The Sambathions”, p.55; for the well-known phonetic equivalence ‘mb’ – ‘bb’, cf. *ibidem* p.47, or also M.P. NILSSON, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, II, 2, Munich 1961², p.665 n.6. The author acknowledges “a certain relationship in the use of the two names: while ‘Sambathion’ gradually loses its power, ‘Sambas’ becomes more and more frequent” (p.55); at the same time, he rightly insists on the fact that, “if Sambathion [male “Sambathion”, female “Sambàthion”], phonetically recalling Sabbath and Sambathis [“the goddess of Sabbath”], could reasonably serve as an appropriate name for Sabbath-observers, Sambas, more distantly removed from these phonetic associations, could hardly retain any connection with Sabbath” (*ibidem*). This phenomenon explains in part why the name became popular also with Christians since a certain period onwards (cf. J. KAJANTO, *Onomastic Studies in the Early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthago*, Helsinki 1963, p.106 ff.): it was not absolutely necessary to be a Sabbath-observer for

deciding to give to one's son such a name. But for us it is particularly important what was remarked by G. MUSSIES ("Jewish Personal Names in Some Non-Literary Sources", in J.W. Van HENTEN - P.W. Van der HORST eds., *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums, XXI, Leiden-New York-Koln 1994, pp.270-2), namely that the name's wide spread in Egypt was perhaps due more to a popular Egyptian etymology than to its originary Hebrew meaning: we believe, in fact, that such an interference might have happened between this set of proper names recalling the Hebrew day of rest and the other ones phonetically close to them, as well as the formally similar Greek or Semitic expressions which we have encountered till now.

112) *Shabbat goy* (female = *Shabbath goyah*) is an equivalent Hebrew expression. Actually the strict religious law does not allow to employ a non-Jew for doing work forbidden to a Jew on the Sabbath-day. The rule of the Rabbis in fact recites: *amirah le-goy shebut*, i.e. "to bid a Gentile to perform work on the Sabbath is still a breach of the Sabbath law", even if the sin is in this case less heavy than performing the work oneself; thus, "under certain circumstances the Rabbis allowed the employment of non-Jews, especially to heat the oven on winter days in northern countries" (*JE*, s.v.). There are many legends in which this person, not seldom replaced by a Golem, plays a central role; it is perhaps also interesting to know that the Russian novelist Maxim Gorki worked once with a similar role for the Jewish colonists in the governments of Kherson and Yekaterinoslav. FELDMAN, "Proselytes and 'Sympathizers'", p.291, rates this office among the 28 historical factors of Gentiles' attraction to Judaism counted by him; cf. Idem, "Proselytism by Jews in the 3rd, 4th and 5th ccs.", p. 32.

113) *Sat.*, XIV, 96 ff. This passage is a classical reference-mark in the scholarly debate about Proselytes and God-Fearers: the discussion started with an article by J. BERNAYS, "Die Gottesfürchtigen bei Juvenal", in H. USENER ed., *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, II, Berlin 1885 (= Hildesheim 1971), pp.71-80, and continued along the traditional line, namely questioning whether the verb *metuere* is used technically by Juvenal and thus can be compared with the usage of the Greek expression *phoboumènoi tôn theòn* in *Acts* (see below, p.25 and n.214), and of the Hebrew *yere'i ash-shamayim* in later rabbinic literature (survey in M. STERN, *GLAJJ*, II, Jerusalem 1980, p.103 f.; cf. also below n. 214). It seems unquestionable, however, that the Latin author makes carefully his linguistic choice, because we have to do here with a satire the human figures of which (in this case those of the Father/God-Fearer [*metuentem sabbatha*] and of the Sons/Full Proselytes [*quidam metuunt Iudaicum ius*]) must be immediately understandable by the general Gentile public. We shall return to these verses (below p.25).

114) See p.14 and ns.110-12, p.10 and n.72, p.9 and ns.61-62. For a thorough discussion about the Hebrew "Seven(th)" day during the period which we are mostly dealing with, cf. R. GOLDENBERGER, "The Jewish Sabbath in the Roman World up to the Time of Costantine the Great", *ANRW* II, 19.1 (1979), pp.414-47, with a selected bibliography.

115) Von HARNACK's *Mission and Expansion of Christianity* (ref. above n.60) continues to represent still today a bibliographical milestone for the subject.

116) The example of EPICTETUS (whose verses in this case are quoted by ARRIANUS, *Dissertationes*, II, 9, 19-20) has become proverbial. The author blames the person who only imitates the Jewish way of life (who, literally, "is only acting a part"), without making the last step and becoming thus a real proselyte: yet the word chosen by him for denoting such a final ritual action, *toù bebammènou* ("the man who has been baptized"), made some scholars think that he was not able to distinguish between Jews and Christians. For a summary of the discussion see STERN, *GLAJJ*, I, p.543 f. Epictetus's verses also stimulated the debate about the actual rite for proselytes, whether circumcision was indispensable and whether the baptism was the initiation's final step: see for instance N.J. Mc-ELENEY, "Conversion, Circumcision and the Law", *NTS* 20 (1974), pp.26-37; J. NOLLAND, "Uncircumcised Proselytes ?", *JSJ* 12.2 (1981), pp.173-94. It is worth while stressing that it never existed for Judaism an institution comparable to what H. STRACK - P. BILLERBECK, *Kommentar zum neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 5 Vols., Munich 1924-8, once unexactly called "Half-Proselytism" ("... Gottesfürchtige, die im Neuen Testament *oi phoboumènoi* oder *oi sebòmenoi* genannten Halbproselyten etc.", II, p.716; cf. G.F. MOORE, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, I, Cambridge Mass. 1927, p.338; M. GUTTMANN, *Das Judentum und seine Umwelt*, I, Berlin 1927, pp.76-8), even if – as Aphrodisia had demonstrated – God-Fearers's position was somehow acknowledged into/by the Jewish community. Conversion to Judaism foresaw three ritual conditions for a man wanting to become legally a proselyte: Circumcision is the first one (cf. *Talmud: Kerithoth*, 81a; *Yebamoth*, 46a; *Pesachim*, 8, 8; *Eduyoth*, 5, 2 etc.); Baptism is necessary as well (cf. W. BRANDT, *Die jüdischen Baptismen*, Beihefte zur *ZAW* XVIII, Giessen 1910, where of course also the relative Talmudic

references are given); the third condition, namely that of bringing an offer to Jerusalem's Temple, was no longer able to be accomplished after its destruction by the Romans in 70 C.E. Turning back to the historical difficulties for focusing Christians' identity, a good survey is contained into the first chapter of P. de LABRIOLLE's *La Réaction Paienne. Étude sur la Polémique Antichrétienne du I^{er} au VI^e Siècle*, Paris 1948, pp.19-54.

117) MITCHELL, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos", p.128.

118) See the classical *Aristotle and the Arabs: the Aristotelian Tradition in Islam*, New York-London 1968, by F.E. PETERS; or also J. KRAYE - F. RYAN - C.B. SCHMITT eds., *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle-Ages*, London 1986. Late Antiquity's philosophical schools – Aristotelism, Neoplatonism, Neopythagorism, Stoicism - obviously legitimated somehow such an Islamic interpretation about the most part of the Greek thought. For Plato, and more in general, for the ancient philosophers whose theoretical position contemplates the idea of a Supreme Divinity ruling over the universe and who therefore have to be seen as real Monotheists, see the important study of M. FREDE, "Monotheism and Pagan Philosophy in Later Antiquity", in ATHANASSIADI-FREDE, *Pagan Monotheism*, cit. above n.4, pp.41-67.

119) CICERO, *De Nat. Deor.*, II, 153 (61); cf. I, 45 (... *ut deos pie coleremus*); I, 116 (*Sanctitas autem est scientia colendorum deorum*); I, 117 (... *religionem, quae deorum cultu continetur*).

120) SENECA, *Epist.* XCV, 47.

121) See above, n.84, for the important connection *eusèbeia-philosophia*.

122) See below p.35 f. and ns. 322-324.

123) For a general introduction to the subject, cf. A.J. FESTUGIERE, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, IV (*Le Dieu Inconnu et la Gnose*), 2^{ème} Partie (*La Connaissance Mystique de Dieu*), pp.141-267, Paris 1954.

124) On these adjectives, which represent the most common Latin translation of the Greek *Hypsistos*, see M. SIMON, "Theos Hypstos", *Ex Orbe Religionum*, I (1972), pp.372-385, especially p.380 ff.; F. CUMONT, "Jupiter Summus Exuperantissimus", *ARW* 9 (1906), pp.323-36; P. BATIFFOL, *La Paix Constantinienne et le Catholicisme*, Paris 1914, Excursus B, *Summus Deus*, pp.188-201.

125) About this problem, see the relevant remarks of SIMON, "Theos Hypsistos", p.382 ff., who notices how the Western Church consciously decided in its Latin liturgy to name Jesus Christ by an epithet equivalent to *Summus/Exuperantissimus* (though avoiding these adjectives because in the IV century they were still used in relation to pagan deities and in particular to Jupiter) as the text of the *Gloria* in the Romain Mass clearly continues to show (*Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus Altissimus Jesus Christus*: cf. P. CAPELLE, "Le Texte du Gloria", *RHE* 14 [1949] pp.439-57): "En proclamant du Christ, et non pas du Père, qu'il est le Très Haut, la liturgie ecclésiastique coupe court, par une réaction sans doute instinctive de défense, à une assimilation éventuelle entre le Dieu de la Bible et la divinité suprême des païens: on voit bien comment ceux-ci pouvaient identifier Jupiter à Jahvé; on voit mal comment ils auraient pu l'identifier à Jésus. Si d'autre part *Altissimus* a été retenu, de préférence à *Summus*, qui en est pratiquement synonyme, par l'usage liturgique latin et aussi dans la Vulgate, où il traduit généralement *Elyon-Hypsistos*, il n'est pas exclu, à mon sens, que ce soit, et cette fois délibéré, pour se distinguer de l'usage païen et parer ainsi à toute velléité syncrétisante" (p.384 f.).

126) See below, in particular the paragraph at pp.18-22 and the other one at pp.29-32.

127) GARRUCCI, *Tre Sepolcri con Pitture delle Superstizioni Pagane*, Naples 1852; Idem, *Mélanges d'Archéologie* (CAHIER-MARTIN eds.), Vol. IV, Paris 1854, p.1 ff. (the French text has been shortened); cf. E. MAAS, *Orpheus*, Munich 1895, p.205 ff. (Pl. reproducing tomb's frescos at p.218). The tomb often attracted F. CUMONT's scientific attention, mostly in the course of the several discussions about the possible relation between *Theos Hypsistos*, the god Sabazios and Judaism carried on by him: see *Hypsistos*, Suppl. à la *Revue de l'Instruction Publique en Belgique*, XV, 1, Bruxelles 1897, p.5 and n.1; "Les Mystères de Sabazius et le Judaïsme", *CRAIBL* (1906), p.70 ff.; "A Propos de Sabazius et le Judaïsme", *MB* 14 (1910), p.55 ff.; "Hypsistos", *RE* IX, cols.444-50; cf. A. JAMAR, "Les Mystères de Sabazius et le Judaïsme", *MB* 13 (1909), p.243 ff.; REITZENSTEIN, *Die hellenistische Mysterienreligionen*, p.104 f. About this hypogeum and its interesting mural paintings, see also M. P. NILSSON, "A Propos du Tombeau de Vincentius",

Mélanges Charles Picard 31/2 (1949), pp.764-9 (= Id., *Opuscula Selecta*, III, Lund 1960, pp.176-81); Idem, *GGR*², II, p.662 f.; A.D. NOCK, Review of R.E. GOODENOUGH, *Jewish Symbols in the Graeco-Roman Period*, Vols.I-IV, *Gnomon* 27 (1955), p.565 f.; A.T. CAMPBELL, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*, *EPRO* 11, Leiden 1968, p.329; Sherman E. JOHNSON, "The Present State of Sabazios Research", *ANRW*, II, 17.3, p.1605-6 (with one Plate).

128) "En effet, l'emplacement de la sépulture de Vibia au milieu d'un cimetière chrétien suggère à M. Cumont l'argument suivant. Au début de l'Église, les chrétiens étaient considérés comme une secte dissidente de la synagogue. S'ils ont eu pour l'association des Sabaziastes une sympathie qui s'est manifestée par la communauté des sépultures, c'est qu'ils voyaient également dans les collègues de Vincentius des thiasotes aussi, comme eux, et comme eux séparés de la synagogue. La commune hostilité dont ils étaient l'objet de la part de l'Église-mère les aura rapprochés, et c'est ainsi seulement que l'on peut expliquer comment leurs tombeaux se sont trouvés réunis" (JAMAR, op. cit. p.250).

129) GUARDUCCI, *Tre Sepolcri*, p.68 f.; *Mélanges d'Archéologie*, p.1 ff.: the author claimed that there existed a jump at level of the ground between Praetextatus' catacombs and Vincentius' tomb, which he defines in terms of "un assai grande gradone": but there are many stairs in catacombs' galleries, so that such an argument means nothing, as well as the other main one advanced by him, namely the alleged existence of a "cloison en bois" and of a wall dividing pagan tombs from christian ones placed into the larger part of this necropolis.

130) The same CUMONT's criticisms to GUARDUCCI (refs. above n.127) did not fail to acknowledge the difficulties of arriving to an unquestionable issue of the problem: "Evidemment un examen attentif des lieux par un archéologue permettrait seul de trancher la question. Mais, s'il est permis de formuler une hypothèse d'après l'ensemble des indications fournis jusqu'ici, je pense que la tombe de Vincentius, établie à l'origine dans un souterrain contigu et attendant au cimetière chrétien, fut plus tard, quand celui-ci s'étendit, enveloppé par cette nécropole agrandie ... et qu'alors on boucha l'entrée des archosoliums paiens" ("Les Mystères de Sabazius", p.78 n.1).

131) See above n.129. Despite its evident weakness, JAMAR, op. cit., p.250 ff., did not weaver in defending Guarducci's position.

132) In the first of his studies, *Hypsistos*, quotes above n. 127.

133) In addition to JAMAR's article (quoted above n.127), we can recall here the influential study confuting Cumont by another front, namely rejecting his interpretation of Valerius Maximus' passage, which is the starting point of the syncretistic theory about Sabazius and Judaism proposed by the French scholar: E.N. LANE, "Sabazius and the Jews in Valerius Maximus: A Re-Examination", *JRS* 69 (1979), pp.35-8; cf. STERN, *GLAJJ*, I, pp.358-60; JOHNSON, "The Present State of Sabazios Research", pp.1602-7; TREBILCO, *Jewish Communities*, p.140 f.; USTINOVA, *The Supreme Gods of the Bosporan Kingdom*, p.241 ff. LANE insists upon the historical reliability of Valerius' information, comparing Julius Paris' edition of the text with two other ones, for example that of the epitomist Januarius Nepotianus where the reference to Sabazius is lacking. But in any case we believe that the most important issue of the text is the demonstration that the equivalence between Jupiter-Sabazius and Yahwé-Sabaoth was commonly accepted, even if only by pagans: the fact is well illustrated by SIMON, "Jupiter-Yahwé", p.42 ff., who discusses the Latin passage in question dismissing the possibility of a textual error (for the phonetical closeness between the alternative writing of the tetragram denoting God's name often used in magical papyri, *Iao* – with the parallel written forms *Iaoue*, *Iabe* etc. –, and *Jovis/em/e*, see *ibidem*, p.44 ff.; for *Iao* in Magic, O. EISSFELD, "Jahwe-Name und Zauberwesen", *Kleine Schriften*, I, 1962, p.162 ff.).

134) VALERIUS MAXIMUS, *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, I, 3, 2 (text: STERN, *GLAJJ*, p.358, nos.147a, 147b; LANE, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Sabazii*, II, *EPRO* 100, Leiden 1985, p.47 no.12).

135) CUMONT, "Les Mystères de Sabazius et le Judaïsme", p.66. Cumont's thesis had been accepted by many scholars: T. EISELE, art. Sabazius", ROSCHER's *Lexicon* IV, (1909), cols.263-4; SCHAEFER, art. "Sabazios", *RE* (2 Reihe), I, 2, cols.540-51; NOCK-ROBERTS-SKEAT, "The Guild of Theos Hypsistos", p.63; E. BICKERMANN, "The Altars of Gentiles. A Note on the Jewish 'ius sacrum'", *RIDA* 5 (1958), pp.137-64 (= *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, II, Leiden 1980, pp.324-46); C. PICARD, "Sabazios, Dieu Thraco-Phrigien: Expansion et Aspects Nouveaux de Son Culte", *RA* 2 (1961), p.146; .M. HENGEL, *Judaism and Hellenism, Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, I,

London 1974, p.263; SIMON, “Jupiter-Yahwé”, p.52 ff.; SANIE, “*Deus Aeternus et Theos Hypsistos en Dacie Romaine*”, p.1109; FELLMANN, “Der Sabazios-Kult”, p.317; STERN, *GLAJJ*, I (1976), no.147, where various other views are to be found summarized (p.359). For the divine epithet *Yahwé Saba’òth* cf. for example L. KOELER - W. BAUMGARTNER, *HALAT* II, p.934 f., s.v *sabà*.

136) That is what already CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier*, I, p.233, explicitly acknowledged: “Die Mohammedaner verfuhrten bei ihnen Erklarungen von fremden Vortern und Eigennamen, wie einmalls die Griechen, die Alles aus ihrer eigenen Sprache ableiten wollten”. Actually a popular etymology is the most likely explanation for the pagan identification Sabazios-Sabaoth, because of the similarity of the former word with the latter and/or with *Sabbath*.

137) Cf. the alleged origin of the words *sebasmòs* and *sebàzein*, probably under the influence of the similar sounding derivatives of *sèbomai*, handed down by ARISTOPHANES’ *Scholia* (text: E.N. LANE, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Sabazii*, II, p.51 nos.39-40; commentary III, Leiden 1989, p.51 ff.).

138) SEMERANO, *Le Origini della Cultura Europea*, p.536 f. and p.608; cf. *Greek Etymological Dictionary* s.v. “Sabini”.

139) C. BLINKENBERG’s magistral monograph, “Darstellungen des Sabazios und Denkmaler seines Kultes”, in *Archaeologische Studien*, Copenagen 1904, is the basis which all later studies about these votive hands depend on; E.R. GOODENOUGH, *Jewish Symbols in the Graeco-Roman Period*, New York 1953-65, II, p.267, 3 fig.1139, reproduced and commented an amulet bearing the inscription *Iaò Sabaòth* along with the figures often found on these cultural symbols and thus demonstrating the connection Sabazios-Judaism; a quite up-to-date information is provided by LANE, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Sabazii*, I, entirely dedicated to god’s hands, with exhaustive iconographical documentation.

140) H.P. L’ORANGE, *Studies in the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World*, Oslo 1953, pp.184-7, maintained that such a gesture is not a god’s “specific mark”, being common to the whole ancient world; likewise JOHNSON, “The Present State of Sabazios Research”, p.1595 f. n.41, states that “it is now generally agreed that Christians [and Jews] did not borrow the gesture from the Sabazios cult”. Yet, the more recent study of FELLMANN, “Der Sabazios-Kult”, signalizes another significant current of thought into the contemporary approach to the matter: “die Berührungspunkte ... mit dem jüdischen Glauben in der Diaspora in Kleinasien und in der Spätzeit mit christlichen Gemeinden (Vincentiusgrab in der Praetextatkatcombe) gehabt zu haben schein” (p.332). The relation Sabazios-Theòs Hypsistos is epigraphically witnessed by the famous inscription from Piroto, where the god (*T.H. epokòo*) is invoked by a *thiàsos Sebazianòs* (text: LANE, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Sabazii*, II, p.3 no.6; cf. COLPE-LOW, *RAC* XVI, col.1040); for a discussion see TATSCHJEVA-HITOVA, “Dem Hypsistos geweihte Denkmaler in Thrakien”, p.298; TREBILCO, *Jewish Communities*, p.141 f., who criticizes the different pieces of the evidence supporting Cumont’s thesis; USTINOVA, *The Supreme Gods*, p.242, who also summarizes the historical debate about the question.

141) “Während über die Genese und das Herkommen des Kultes relative Klarheit herrscht – FELLMANN, “Der Sabazios-Kult”, p.131, writes - sind unsere Informationen über den Ablauf der Kulthandlungen ... sehr unvollständig”.

142) SEMERANO, *Le Origini della Cultura Europea*, p.105 f.

143) *De Corona*, 259-60: cf. LANE, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Sabazii*, II, p.52, (text); III, p.48 ff. (discussion, with a detailed analysis of classical sources recording the word and its different readings: a cry, very soon connected by ancient commentators with Sabazios/Dionisos’ orgiastic cult; a masculine plural form = Sabazios/Dyionisos’ worshippers/priests, the name *Sabos* being bore by both these deities; the holy places consecrated to the god[s]).

144) CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier*, I, p.96.

145) DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Vit. Phil.* VIII, 1, § 31, reproducing a I century B.C.E. apocryphal work, informs us that Hermes escorts the souls after their separation from the body to the Most-High (*epì tòn Hypsiston*); cf. CUMONT, “Hypsistos”, p.11 and n.1 as well as “Les Mystères de Sabazius”, p.74 and n.4, for the mythological figure of Hermes *psychopompos*.

146) The mention of Angelus Bonus, whom CUMONT (“Hypsistos” p.4 and ns.6-7, p.5 and n.1, “Les Mystères de Sabazius”, p.72 f. and ns.1-4) thought to be an evident sign of the connection of these Roman findings with the Jewish religious culture, has been long discussed, starting with JAMAR’s criticism (“Les Mystères de Sabazius”, p.43 ff.): the bibliographical references quoted in the last notes allow the reader to acknowledge the main partakers of the scholarly debate.

147) For a quite clear reproduction of these paintings, see JOHNSON, “The Present State of Sabazios Research”, p.1605; for the text, see LANE, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Sabazii*, II, p.31 f.; exhaustive bibliography in M.J. VERMASEREN, *De onderlinge betrekkingen tussen Mytras-Sabazius-Cybele*, in *Academiae Analecta*, Bruxelles 1984, p.34 ff. About Angels’ cult, see however below, pp. 29-31.

148) The Harrànians claimed that Hermes and Agathodaimon were not only their own prophets, but also their first masters in their quality of mediators between men and the Holy Heavenly Beings and, above all, God, the absolutely transcendental “God of the gods” (for which definition see below p. 34 and n. 304): for Medieval Muslim sources, see GREEN, *The City of the Moon-God*, at the relative chapter; GUNDUZ, *The Knowledge of Life*, p.157 f. (al-Nadim, al-Mas’udi, al-Biruni, al-Baghdadi, Ibn Hazm, al-Dimashqi, al-Shahrastani, Bar-Hebraeus), where different transcriptions of the names (*‘Adimun*, *‘Agadhimun*, *‘Aghathadhimun*, etc.; *Harmis*, *Harmas*, *Haramasah* etc.) are recorded. For the equation Hermes-‘Idris, which is a traditional identification thorough Islamic exegetical tradition (cf. *Qur’an* 19, 56-7; 21, 85), and the further equation ‘Idris-‘Aknukh/Khunukh etc. (= Biblical Henokh/Enoch, according to AL-BIRUNI, *Chronology*, p.188, or to AL-MAQDISI, *Kitab al-bad’ wa al-ta’rikh*, Paris 1899-1903, ed. and FT by C. HUART, *Le Livre de la Création et de l’Histoire*, III, Paris 1903, p.12: “... Idris is no other than Enoch ... He was the first prophet who received a mission after Adam ... He is the first who traced characters by means of pen ... His name among the Greeks is Hermes” [we quote from W. SCOTT, *Hermetica*, IV, Oxford 1936, p.252]), see M. PLESSNER, art. “Hirmis”, *EF* III, pp.479-81, or for example Y. MARQUET, “Sabéens et Ikhwan al-Safa’”, *SI* 24 (1966), p.36 and n.3, and p.56 ff.; for Agathodaimon, M. PLESSNER, art. “Agathadhimun”, *EF* I, p.244-5, whereas the identification with Adam’s son Seth (*Shith*) is quite late, because it seems to have been firstly proposed only in the VI H./XII c. by AL-SHAHRASTANI, *Milal*, GT by T. HAARBRUCKER, *Religionspartheien und Philosophen-Schulen*, Halle 1851, II, p.3 (and then by AL-DIMASHQI, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, FT M.A.F. MEHREN, *Manuel de la Cosmographie du Moyen Age*, Copenhagen 1874, p. 46 f.; ABU AL-FIDA’, *Al-mukhtasar fi akhbâr al-bashar*, ed. H. FLEISCHER, Vogel 1831, pp.14, 148; BAR HEBRAEUS, *Ta’rikh mukhtasar al-duwal*, ed. A. SALHANI, Beirut 1890, p.12); cf. G. MONNOT, “Sabéens et Idolâtres selon ‘Abd al-Jabbâr”, *MIDEO* 12 (1974), p.30; R. REITZENSTEIN, *Poimandres*, Leipzig 1904, p.170 ff.; but above all H. CORBIN, “Rituel Sabéen et Exegèse Ismaélienne du Rituel”, *Eranos Jahrbuch* 19 (1950), pp.181-246, who does not waver in connecting such a phenomenon to Ismailism and to Ismailian Historiosophy.

149) Obviously we use the expression in a non-technical sense, having already signalized its inaccuracy above, n.116. It is worth noticing the equation *Sabi’* – “Convert” proposed by De BLOIS, “Sabians in Arabia”, p.52, even if we cannot agree with him for the further identification *Sabi’* – “Manichaeism”, nor, of course, with M. GIL who tries to prove the truthfulness of this relation in his study “The Creed of Abu ‘Amir”, *IOS* 12 (1992), pp.9-57.

150) The first orientalist to have recognized such a connection was T. NOLDEKE, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, Strasbug 1910, p.35 (who at the same time rejected the hypothesis of a loan from Ethiopic, proposed by Winckler, as well as the Hanifs’ link with some South Arabian cult, suggested by Grimme), followed by several scholars (Andrae, Ahrens, Mingana etc.); cf. A. JEFFERY, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’an*, Baroda 1938, p.115; AL-MAS’UDI, *Kitab al-tanbih wa al-ishraf*, FT by B. CARRA De VAUX (*Le Livre de l’Avertissement et de la Revision*), Paris 1896, p.130, is the only Medieval Muslim writer suggesting this relationship, whereas all the others maintained a pure Arabic origin of the word (which opinion gave rise among orientalists to the idea, firstly advanced by Sprenger, of the Hanifs as a organized religious group existing before Muhammad’s times). R. PAYNE-SMITH, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, I, Oxford 1879, col.1322, collected the various occurrences of *hanpa*; cf. also W. MONTGOMERY WATT, art. “Hanif”, *EF* III, pp.168-70. The Syriac influence is due both to the fact that this was the language with which the Arabs were most closely in touch till Muhammad’s times and to the role of the Christian Arabs on Arab folklore: cf., in addition to Jeffery, S. FRAENKEL, *Die Aramaischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen*, Leiden 1886; K. AHRENS, “Christliches in Qoran”, *ZDMG* 84 (1930), pp.15-68. For the Harranian milieu, see the famous *Book of the Hanifs* which AL-NADIM, *K. al-Fihrist*, p.21 f. (ET p.41) mentions among the Revealed Books, quoting Ahmad bin Abdallah bin Salâm (a *mawla* of Caliph Harun al-Rashid): “I have translated this book from a book of the *Hunafa’* of al-Sabiyyun al-Ibrahimiyyah, who believed in Ibrahim

[Abraham], for whom may there be peace, and who received from him the scripture [*al-suhuf*] revealed to him by Allàh”. However, it is difficult to decide whether we have to do here with the same book which AL-NADIM again, in the *Fihrist*’s next section about the Harrànian Sabians, cites as a text of Magic of their own with the title of (*Kitàb*) *al-hàtifi* (ET p.754; the alternative reading *al-hunafà*’ is suggested *ibidem* n.42). Though identifying this last text with the *Book of the Hanifs* included in turn by the *Gàyat al-hakim* among the instruments of the magic-liturgic apparatus of the second prayer addressed to Jupiter (cf. also the “greater incense of the *Hanifs*” in the prayer addressed to the Sun, and the “smaller incense of the *Hanifs*” in the prayer addressed to the Moon, GT p.228 and p.236), R. DOZY - J. De GOEJE, “Nouveaux Documents pour l’Etude de la Religion des Harràniens”, *Travaux de la 6e Session du Congrès International des Orientalistes*, II, Leiden 1885, p.295 f., radically rejected this possibility: “Le livre des Hanif est donc le livre saint des Harràniens, et il me semble indoubitable que dans le passage du *Fihrist* il faut lire *al-Kitàb al-Hanafi* ou bien *Kitàb al-Hunafà*’. Il est question du même livre dans un autre passage du *Fihrist* (22,1), mais il y a évidemment confusion entre le livre des Harràniens et un autre ouvrage traitant des doctrines des vraies Sabiens”. But the circumstance is not absurd at all, as HJARPE, *Les Sabéens Harràniens*, p.32 and n.3, already observed. For the expression “*suhuf* of Abraham”, see *Sùras* 53,38, 87,18 ff. , and 20,133; cf. *EP* s.v.; for *al-Sàbiyùn al-Ibràhimiyah*, see the famous story handed down by AL-KISA’I (refer. below, n.152).

151) For the etymology of the word, JEFFERY, op. cit., pp.112-5; D.S. MARGOLIOUTH, “On the Origin and Import of the Names Muslim and Hanif”, *JRAS* 35 (1903), in particular pp.477-93; C.J. LYALL, “The Words Hanif and Muslim”, *JRAS* 35 (1903), pp.771-84. The study of N.A. FARIS - H.W. GLIDDEN, “The Development of the Meaning of Koranic *Hanif*”, *JPOS* 19 (1939), pp.1-18, perhaps provides still today the best summary of the problem. A wide literary survey of pre-Islamic and Muslim sources, is made by GIL, “The Creed of Abù ‘Amir”, pp.9-13 and 15 f.. For a Hebrew origin see below n.186. It is worth noting here as – in striking parallelism with the Hebrew and the Arabic roots *SHWBH*, *SB*’ and *SBW* observed above, p.8 f. and notes, also the Arabic root *HNF* displays an ambivalent value: see again JEFFERY, op. cit., p.113 f., where the following meanings of the verb *hanafa* are recorded: “to incline”, “to decline from the proper standard (also used for a natural contordness of the feet)”, thus including the nuance of “inclining from a crooked standard to the straight”, and particularly that one of “turning from the false religion to the true”.

152) *Qur’àn*, 3, 67; cf. 2, 129; 3, 60, 89; 4, 124; 6, 162; 16, 121, 123 etc.: of the twelve cases where the word is used, eight (FARIS-GLIDDEN, op. cit., p.112: seven) refer to Abraham’s faith, whereas in nine of them there is an added phrase explaining that to be a *hanif* means not being a polytheist, this explanatory phrase apparently showing Muhammad’s need to be rightly understood by his hearers. We limit ourselves to remember the crucial role played by the Patriarch in the history of Harràn: the city in fact – as it is well known – is not only a stage along the way from Ur to the land of Canaan, but also the place where Abraham found a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24, 1ff.), as well as the place where – one generation later – Jacob spent 20 years working for his uncle Laban winning two brides in the process (Gen. 29, 1-30). For a general survey, including Muslim traditions according to which the city and Abraham’s father himself are seen as archetypal symbols of idolatry and impiety, see GREEN, op. cit., p.10 ff., or GUNDUZ, *The Knowledge of Life*, p.43 ff.; add. G. STROHMAIER, “Eine sabische Abrahamlegende und Sure 37, 83-93”, in P. NAGEL (ed.), *Studien in Gnosis und Manichaismus*, Halle 1979, pp.223-27; E. FASCHER, “Abraham, *physiologos* und *philos theou*”, in A.STUIBER – A. HERMANN (eds.), *Mullus. Festschrift Th. Klauser*, Munster 1964, pp.111-24 (for Jewish traditions): of special interest the distinction attributed to AL-KISA’I (*Qisas al-anbiyà*’, tr. in CHWOLSON, op. cit., II, p.502 f.; cf. J.H. HOTTINGER, *Historia Orientalis*, Tiguri 1651, I, 8, p.256 ff.; ABRAHAM EXCELLENSIS, *De Origine Nominis Papae*, Romae 1660, p.314 f.) between “real Sabians” or followers of Abraham’s religion (“these are the Brahmins” [!]), and “false Sabians” or followers of Seth, Idris and Noah’s religion (“and these continued to live in the region of Harràn”), someway parallel to the distinctions between *Hunafà*’ and Harrànians (worshipping the planets and idols) made by IBN HAZM (*Kitàb al-fasl fi al-milal wa al-ahwà’i wa al-nihàl*, ed. Cairo 1317 H., I, p.35), and between *Hunafà*’ and Sabians made by AL-SHAHRASTANI (*Milal*, GT p.8 ff.).

153) Cf. above p.6 and n.38: the equivalence Hanifs – Sabians had been previously proposed by A. SPRENGER, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammed*, Berlin 1869², p.45 ff., taking especially into account the *Book of the Hanifs* quoted by AL-NADIM among the holy texts in possession of the Harrànians (cf. above n.150); add T. ANDRAE, *Mohammed*, ET by T. MENZEL, New-York 1930, pp.150-5. *Contra* J. HOROWITZ, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Leipzig-Berlin 1926, p.58 ff.

154) Cf. for example TARDIEU, “Sàbiens”, p.8 ff. , T. FAHD,’s art. “Sàbi’a”, *EP* VIII, *passim*, or also GUNDUZ, op. cit., p.20 f.

155) BAR HEBRAEUS, *Chronicum Syriacum*, ed. P. BEDJAN, Paris 1890, p.168; the titles of Thàbit's works are also recorded by CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier*, II, pp.ii-iii, with a LT partially reproducing that one contained in the famous edition of the *Chronicum* previously made by P.J. BRUNS - G.W. KIRSCH (*Chronicon Syriacum*, Lipsiae 1789), at p.180. De BLOIS, "Sabians in Arabia", p.41 f. n.8, has put in doubt the reliability of these Syriac titles, which according to him is in turn a copy of an original Arabic version (drawn up by AL-QIFTI, *Ta'rikh al-hukamà'*, ed. A. MULLER - J. LIPPERT, Leipzig 1903, p.120), but his doubts seem to us unjustified.

156) AL-NADIM, *Kitàb al-Fihrist*, p.320, ET II, p.751 f. For other shorter accounts of the same episode by the Medieval Muslim scholars, cf. above n.17 and below, p.21 and n.180.

157) PEDERSEN, "The Sábians" p.390 f., HJARPE, *Les Sabéens Harràniens*, p.40 ff., SEGAL, "The Sabian Mysteries", p.212 ("This story is in fact improbable"), are among the scholars criticizing AL-NADÌM's account. Completely different the reasons of Lady E.S. DROWER, *The Secret Adam. A Study of Nasoraean Gnosis*, Oxford 1960, p.111, who believes that Thàbit and the other famous Harranian men of science not seldom in friendly relations with Baghdad Caliphs could not be "false Sabians" as Chwolson and many others with him had claimed, but "real" ones, *i.e.*, according to her unshakable point of view, none else than ... Mandaeans!

158) "... Who else has established culture and founded cities but the nobles and kings of *hanpùtho* ... To whom did the Divinity reveal the gift of divination and knowledge of the future but to the famed ones of the *hanpè*? ... Without these things the world would be empty and poor" (BAR HEBRAEUS, *Chronicum*, p.168-9; we have used the ET of the passage contained in FARIS-GLIDDEN, "The Meaning of Koranic *Hanif*", p.9).

159) So for example E.A.W. BUDGE, *The Chronography of Bar Hebraeus*, London 1976 (I ed. 1932), p.153 ("heathen", "heathenism"); or, likewise, CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier*, I, pp.177-8 ("Heiden", "Heidentum").

160) HJARPE, *Les Sabéens Harràniens*, p.31; an English parallel is furnished by FARIS-GLIDDEN's translation quoted above n.158

161) ROGER BACON, *Opus Magnus*, ed. J.H. BRIDGES, I, Oxford 1897 (= New-York 1964), p.394; cf. L. THORNDIKE, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, I, New York 1923, p.661; GREEN, *The City of Moon-God*, p.163.

162) G. FLUGEL, *Dissertatio de Arabicis Scriptorum Graecorum Interpretibus*, Missenae 1841, p.17; cf. CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier*, I, p. 80.

163) Obviously we do not agree with CHWOLSON, *loc. cit.*, who seems to be convinced – it is difficult to say whether in good faith or not – that such an information is due to a common misunderstanding about Mandaeans according to which they would not be but Christians, because of the name "Christians of St. John" remained popularly in use till today since when Medieval Western travellers began to use it and to make it known in Europe, by lending ear to a claim by Mandaean priests that John the Baptist was a member of their sect.

164) Cf. above ns.136-7.

165) FARIS-GLIDDEN, "The Meaning of Koranic *Hanif*", p.5 ff. and 17 f.

166) "In Christian Arabic *hanif* is a broad term used for pagans. However it does not describe the barbarous heathen of the Arabian desert, who were closest to Muhammad's eye, but the stubborn partisans of the old Graeco-Roman religion, especially of the mystery cults and their oriental offshoots, who were the principal target of the polemic of the Christian church. It must be remembered that these were not a simple and ignorant people, but included such able intellects as that of Porphyry of Tyre, who was the direct ancestor of such men as Thàbit b. Qurrah and al-Battàni": FARIS-GLIDDEN, *op. cit.*, p.5; cf. NOLDEKE, *Neue Beitrage*, p.35 n.4.

167) Cf. LIEU, "The Race of the God-Fearers", who identifies some II century literary parallels to ARISTIDE's *Apology* beginning with the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (about which see B. DEHANDSCHUTTER, *Martyrium Polycarpi. Een literair-kritische Studie* [BETL 52], Leuven 1979),

where both the idea of the Christians as a “race” (*ghenos*) and the emphasis on their “fear of God” (*theosèbeia*) can also be found. For the Jewish previous claim to be the “race of the most righteous men”, cf. p.492 ff. On the meaning and origins of the expression *tertium genus hominum*, see the study of L. BAECK, in *Jewish Studies in Memory of G.A. Kohut* (1935), p.40.

168) SIMON, *Verus Israel*, p.151; cf. JUSTINUS, *Dial. c. Triph.*, 119, 6, where we read that it is the Christians, and not the faithless Jews, who represent the nation (*èthnos*) promised to Abraham, sharing his faith, God-fearing and righteous (*theosebès kai dikaion*).

169) As we have noted (cf. in particular above n.84), since the II century onwards Piety and Philosophy, namely Monotheism and Civilization, walk side by side according to Christian Apologists too: those who do not share Christian piety are barbarous and/or impious. It is not by chance, for example, that the *Epistle to Diognetus* has its starting point from a “person of consequence’s” wish to know the Christian doctrine (BERTRAM, art. “Theosebès”, col.127). Obviously a similar claim was made also by the Jews: see *4 Maccab.*, where the main theme is a demonstration of how “devout reason” (*eusebès logismòs*) should rule man’s emotions (1, 1; 6, 31; 17, 1, 3; 1, 18; 18, 1-3), combining hellenistic commitment to “reason” with the Jewish commitment to the Law; or also another classical example of the Hellenistic Judaism’s framework (about which cf. G. BERTRAM, “Der Begriff ‘Religion’ in der Septuaginta”, *ZDMG* 12 [1934], pp.1-5) such as *Joseph and Aseneth*, where the “Fear of God” is an exclusive feature applicable only to the Jews or to those adopting the same pattern of belief and behaviour (cf. C. BURCHARD, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth* [WUNT 8], Tübingen 1965, especially p.640; M. PHILONENKO, *Joseph et Asèmeth. Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction et Notes*, Leiden 1968, pp.142-3).

170) We must keep in mind to be always on the ground of religious polemics: see the charge of impiety laid against the Christians by their pagan neighbours (ARISTIDES, *Apology*, 4, 7; 27, 1; *II Apol.*, 10, 4: cf. J.R. HARRIS, *The Apology of Aristides*, Texts and Studies I, 1, Cambridge 1893).

171) ARISTIDES, *Apology*, 2, 1. Aristides seems to ignore the fact that many ancient authors looked at the Jews as barbarians, cf. LIEU, “The Race of the God-Fearers”, p.489. It is interesting to note that Ps. JUSTIN appeals to a Greek oracle in order to seek pagan support for the epithet *theosebès* which, when asked who were the “God-fearing men”, declared that “only the Chaldaeans achieved wisdom, and then the Hebrews who hold God in holy awe as self-begotten and lord” (*Cohort. ad Graec.*, 11, 2 and again 24, 28-9).

172) To tell the truth, in this particular Apologetical period there are not many Greek personalities escaping Christian censure: so for example if by one side the Christians feel themselves close to Socrates because of the same charge of “atheism” (*asèbeia*) laid against him as well as against “those who are called ‘God-Fearers’ and ‘Christians’” (*tois theosebeis kai khristianois kaloumènous: Ad Autol.*, III, 4), by the other one they do not waver to acknowledge the whole bankruptcy of the Greeks, including Aristotle and Plato, who learned from Moses but apostasized from the “true fear of God” (Ps. JUSTINUS, *Cohor. ad Graec.*, 25, 24; 36, 33: cf. M. MARCOVICH ed., *Pseudo-Iustinus. Cohortatio ad Graecos. De Monarchia. Oratio ad Graecos* [PTS 12], Berlin-New York 1990, p.4, who accepts a date for this work ranging between 260 and 302), and whom on the contrary Christian theoretical developments will not find too difficult to make fitting with the orthodox doctrine. The same phenomenon happens on the front of the Jews: their virtual place is acknowledged as a righteous seed of “ ‘God-fearing’ and holy men, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH, *Ad Autol.*, iii, 9), but on the other hand they are charged to be those “who are neither esteemed nor lovers of God nor understanding” (JUSTINUS, *Dial. c. Triph.*, 118, 3).

173) ARISTIDES, *Apology*, Syriac Version, loc. cit. For the lost of the work’s title – which originally may have looked like “Concerning the ‘Fear of God’ (*Theosèbeia*)” – together with the heading of the Greek text, see LIEU, “The Race of the God-Fearers”, p.489 and n.21.

174) TERTULLIAN (*Ad Nat.* I, 9; *Scorp.* 10, 10) rejected the label *tertium genus* as a slur on the lips of the Christians’ opponents. Cf. below n.195 for the correspondence Planets/Peoples/Religions.

175) See the existence of a “real religious frontier” in relation to the various God-Worshippers’ communities, acknowledged by some scholars, below n.240.

176) For the Hellenistic tradition kept particularly alive by Harranian scholars, the old picture drawn by CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier*, I, p.542 ff. seems us still valid; a detailed summary is quite recently given by F.C. De BLOIS, art. “Sàbi”, pp.692-4, with single bio-bibliographies, whereas E. WIEDEMANN, “Ueber

Tabit ben Qurra, sein Leben und Werken”, *Sitzunberichte der Phisikalisch-medizinischen Societat in Erlangen*, 52-3 (1920-1), pp.189-219 (further bibliography in J. RUSKA, art. “Tàbit b. Kurra”, *EI* IV, p.771), is still the main reference for the leading personality of the group; for a general account, see THORNIDIKE, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, I, pp.661-666 ; S. SEZGIN, *GAS*, VI Leiden 1978, *passim* . For the huge work of translation into Syriac and Arabic of Greek scientific and philosophical texts, in consequence of which Harrànians have to be considered one of the main transmission channels of the Hellenic culture to the West during the Middle Ages, see for example D.D. De LACY O’ LEARY, *Arabic Thought and its Place in the History*, London 1922, pp.43, 54-5 and 105 ff.; or also Idem, *How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs*, London 1948, p.172 ff.

177) *Acta Conciliorum*, II, ed. Paris 1614, p.518 ff., cf. IX, pp.34 and 37; quoted by CHWOLSON, op. cit. I, p.438, cf. pp.15, and 303; see also ASSEMANI, *Bibl. Or.*, I, p.207 n.210: *Charras enim, seu Haran, Syri appellare solent Paganorum urbem, quo ab ea idolorum cultus initium duxerit*. Actually Syriac makes use in this case of *Hanpè* or also of the word “Roman” (= *Armoyo*), keeping in mind that in the course of Middle Ages for Arabs and more in general for Near Eastern peoples Romans = Byzantines, the latter being then the actual representatives of the Roman Empire (as for example al-Birùni’s passage quoted below in our text demonstrates): cf. CHWOLSON, op. cit., p.439 ff.; FARIS-GLIDDEN, “The Meaning of the Koranic *Hanif*”, p.6.

178) TARDIEU’s thesis, proposed by him in the study “Sàbiens coraniques et ‘Sàbiens’ de Harràn”, is very well-known: according to the French scholar, the clear Neoplatonic mark of the Harrànian theological system and more in general of the Harrànian culture would go back to the last Neoplatonists’ transfert into Harràn after the shutting of Athen’s philosophical school by Justinian (529), but the several pieces of evidence produced by him unfortunately do not provide a final demonstration: cf. also his “Les Calendriers en Usage à Harràn d’après les Sources Arabes et le Commentaire de Simplicius à la Phisique d’Aristote”, in I. HADOT ed., *Simplicius. Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, Sa Sourvie*, Berlin-New York 1987, pp.40-57; or his *Les Paysages Reliques*, Louvain-Paris n.d. [1990], *passim*.

179) IKHWAN AL-SAFA’, *Rasà’il*, ed. Beirut, IV, 1957, p.295.

180) AL-BIRUNI, *Chronology*, ET p.314 f. Al-Birùni looks at the Harrànians as “false Sabians”, the “true” ones living in his opinion in Southern Iràq, “in Wasit and its vicinity” (cf. below p.22 f.): he accepts in other words al-Nadim’s account about the encounter/dispute between Caliph al-Ma’mun and the Harrànians, in consequence of which the latter claimed to be “Sabians”, just for the purpose of being reckoned among the *Dhimmi*s: “before that time they were called heathens [*hunafà*’], idolaters [*wathaniyah*] and Harrànians” (cf. p.188). For the special tax payed by religious minorities in exchange of toleration into Muslim countries, see the classical references: A.S. TRITTON, *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects*, London 1930; A. FATTAL, *Le Statut Legal des Non-Musulmans en Pays d’Islam*, Beirut 1958; C. CAHEN, art. “Dhimma”, *EF*, II, pp.234-8.

181) SPRENGER, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad*, I, pp.43 and 67-9, III, p.8 f.; C.C. TORREY, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, New York 1933, p.51; C.S. LYALL, “The Words Hanif and Muslim”, *JRAS* 35 (1903), p.781; cf. JEFFERY, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’an*, p.115; FARIS-GLIDDEN, “The Meaning of the Koranic *Hanif*”, p.1.

182) This opinion is recorded by GIL, “The Creed of Abù ‘Amir”, p.19, among other III century Talmudic references to *minim* (a common designation for heretics in *Talmud*) expressed by Rabbi Jonathan ben Eleazar and Rabbi Abbàhù (*Berèshit rabbà* v, 24; xi, 5, ed. THEODOR-ALBECK, p.238 and p.480); cf. MARGOLIOUTH, “The Names Muslim amd Hanif”, p.479: “a tradition embodied in the *Midrash Rabbah* (Gen., § 48) states that wherever the word *Hànèf* occurs in the Old Testament it refers to religious dissent (*minùth*)”; the author also records a quite curious information according to which “in Morocco the name ‘Epicurus’ is familiarly used for Christian missionary, having been at first applied by the Jews to the missionaries who came to work amongst themselves. This very word ‘Epicurus’ is used in the *Yalkut Shim’oni* to gloss the word *Hànèf*”.

183) R. BELL, *The Origin of Islam and Its Christian Environment*, London 1926 (= 1968), p.58; for other scholars, in addition to those already quoted (Margoliouth, Lyall) thinking to an independent Arabian movement (Grimme, Pautz, Lammens, St. Claire-Tisdall, Fuck), see FARIS-GLIDDEN, op. cit., p.1 f. n.3. Their mutual agreement among Muslim lexicographers about the Arabic etimology of the word (cf. above

n.150) is due to an incorrect methodology commonly followed by them (as Chwolson had already stressed, cf. above n.136).

184) AL-MAS'UDI, loc. cit. (above n.150); cf. JEFFERY, op. cit., p.113 f., for some Medieval lexicographical sources.

185) Cf. below p.35 f. and ns. 314 – 327.

186) H. LAMMENS, “Les Chrétiens à La Mecque à la Veille de l’Hégire”, *BIFAO* 14 (1918), p.210 n.7 (the vehement style by which the great orientalist denounced Muhammad’s alleged ignorance into Christian matters – a real *leit-motiv* of his whole scientific work, as for instance his *L’Arabie Occidentale avant l’Hégire*, Beirut 1928, demonstrates at length – would be today not only unbelievable, it would be a scandal). MARGOLIOUTH, op. cit., p.482, signalizes that *tahannafa* and the V conjugation of the verb *hanatha* (*hinh* = “a crime, perjury”) - curiously displaying an unusual privative sense (thus *tahannatha* with its related noun-form *tahannuth* = “to be devout” just as *tahannafa/tahannuf*) – are commonly identified by the Arabs (IBN HISHAM, *Sirah*, p.152); but LYALL, “The Words ‘Hanif’ and ‘Muslim’”, p.780, does not see any reason for such a connection, since *tahannuth* “occurs only in a tradition relating to the Prophet, who is said to have practised austerities (*tahannatha*) in a cave on Mount Hirà’ before he received revelation”, so that he rather points in this case to a possible derivation from the Hebrew *tehinnoth*, “prayers”. In their turn, FARIS and GLIDDEN, op. cit., p.5, acknowledge a close relationship between the meaning of these two verbs gravitating around the concept of meticulousness, whether in religious or wordy things (*tahannafa* = “was particular, exact”; *tahannatha* = abstained from”)

187) See above n.151. We must also stress the special meaning *hanif* = “orthodox” in IBN HISHAM, *Sirah*, p.871, checked by WELLHAUSEN, *Reste*, p.238 n.1.

188) *Quràn*, 30, 29; cf. 6, 79, which is the other Koranic passage where the close relationship *hanif-fitrah* occurs once again. Cf. moreover 98, 4 where the religion of the *hunafà*’ is referred to as the “Religion of the Resurrection” (*din al-qayamah*). Another very significant commonplace which *Hunafà*’ and Sabians share is represented by the fact that both are seen as the first Religion of the mankind (the fact of being in the meanwhile, as we have just observed, the “Religion of the Resurrection”, namely the last one, is a natural issue of that). IBN HAZM, *Kitàb al-fasl fi al-milal wa al-ahwà’i wa al-nihàl*, ed. Cairo 1317 H., I, p.35, for example writes: “The religion of the Sabians was the oldest from the historical aspects and the most common religion until they fabricated some new [bed] things and therefore changed their binding law”. Cf. also below n.337.

189) The equivalence *Hunafà*’ - “Seekers” is stressed by WELLHAUSEN, *Reste*, p.238, who points out to the originary identity of the former with monks (*ruhàb*, sing. *ràhib*; cf. the verb *tarahhaba*, “to live an ascetic life”) and Christians saints (*ibidem*, p.239 f.; cf. T. NOLDEKE - L. SCHWALLY, *Geschichte des Qorans*, I, Leipzig 1909², p.8; and below n.246).

190) Cf. above p.19 and n.152.

191) IBN HISHAM, *Sirah*, p.143-9, ET, pp.99-103. Historical actuality of these individuals was firstly defended by LYALL, “The Words ‘Hanif’ and ‘Muslim’”, p.744, even if the tradition about them was worked down in Islamic times so that – as we have already noticed (above n.42) – the Koran is necessary to explain these stories rather than the reverse.

192) IBN HISHAM, *Sirah*, p.144, ET p.99; cf. IBN SA’AD, *Kitàb al-tabaqàt al-kabir*, ed. E. SACHAU *et alii*, III, 1, Leiden 1909, p.288.

193) AL-BIRUNI, *Chronology*, p.188; cf. p.314 f..

194) The *LXX* normally translate the Hebrew *ger* with *proselytos*, even if often we have to do only with resident aliens, namely with strangers living in Palestine but not converted to Judaism (cf. for example the expression *ha-ger ‘asèr yagur be-ysra’èl* [Ex. 14, 7] which is rendered with *oi proselyteuòntes en tò Israèl*, “whoever among the strangers dwells in Israel”. In the course of centuries, though, the original connotation of the word took a socio-religious tract that will become the final meaning of the term (cf. the references quoted above n.60). It is worth noting the Greek transcription *geioras* of the aramaean *giyyorà* (Ex. 12, 19; Is 14, 1; but see also PHILO, *Conf. ling.*, 82; JUSTINUS, *Dial.* 122, 1[*geòras* beside *proselytos*]; JULIUS

AFRICANUS, *Ep. ad Arist.*, 5, in EUSEBIUS, *Hist. Eccl.*, I, 7, 13 [*geiòrai = prosèlytoi*]), though, unfortunately, nothing similar happened in the Arab or Syriac versions of the *Acts* in relation to the word *sebòmenos/oi (tòn theòn)*: the *Peshitta* uses in fact in this case the participial form of the root *DHL*, while Arabic uses the participle of the verbs *'abada* and *tawaqqa* or *ittaqā (khàfa* for *oi phoboùmenoi* “fearers”).

194 bis) For the origins and the historical developments of Jewish Proselytism, an excellent but quite up-to-date bibliography is contained in the already quoted art. “Proselyte, Proselytisme”, *DB*, Suppl. VIII, cols.1353-6 (A. PAUL); see therefore also the bibliographical references quoted above n.60. It is to be stressed the semantic correspondence between the Greek verb *prosèrkhomai*, “to go towards, to lean, etc.”, and the above observed semantic nuance of the Arabic verbs *saba'a/sabà* (p.8 f. and notes). Though noticing that “*Sàbi*’ ... came to serve as one of the several designations for ‘proselyte’”, BUCK, “The Identity of the *Sàbi*’un”, p.173 – as well as J. WANSBROUGH, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition in Islamic Salvation History*, London 1978, p.102 – does not arrive to the same unavoidable conclusion of ours; but see also below n.197, for the meaning *prosèlytos* = “convert to Christianity” or more in general “a person approaching anything new”. For Abraham as a prototype of proselytes, see W. BOUSSET - H. GREESMANN, *Die Religion des Judentums in spathellenistischen Zeitalter*, Tübingen 1926³, p.186; or also SIMON, *Verus Israel*, p.205 n.5; actually Abraham, as well as Job, continues to be remembered as preeminently “God-fearing” (Abraham: *4 Macc.* 15, 28; *TNaph.* 1, 10; Anon. in EUSEBIUS, *Praep. Ev.*, ix, 17, 3; in *Genes.*, 22, 12, he is not “God-fearing”, but one who “fears God”; Job: Ps. ARISTEAS in EUSEBIUS, *Praep. Ev.*, ix, 25, 4). For the parallel between Job and Abraham, see also *b. Sotah*, 31a, cited by WILCOX, “The ‘Godfearers’ in Acts”, p.106, who argues that Luke is putting Cornelius, like Simeon and Lydia, within this tradition. For Proselytes, see finally NOCK, *Conversion*, p.61 f. and p.109.

195) Cf. p.253 of the ET by R.R. WRIGHT, London 1934, who also provided the edition of the text. Here, not only a mutual relation Planets-Religions is drawn, each Religion being put in correspondence in its turn also with a single People. The “Horoscope of Religions” theme probably appears for the first time into a similar form in ABU MA'SHAR, *Kitàb al-milal wa-l-duwal*, ed. and ET by K. YAMAMOTO - C. BURNETT, *Abù Ma'shar, on Historical Astrology*, 2 Vols., Leiden-Boston-Köln 2000 (the first vol. contains the Arabic text and the ET; the second one the medieval LT by IOHANNES HISPANUS [*De Magnis Conjunctionibus*], Glossaries and Indexes), whose close relationship with AL-KINDÌ (cf. O. LOTH, “Al-Kindi als Astrolog”, *Morgenlandische Forschungen. Festschrift H.L. Fleischer*, Leipzig 1875, pp.263-309), and consequently with Sabian-Harranian milieu, is very well-known. This circumstance might have given rise to an unusual link of the word *Hanpè/Hanif* which can be found in the 2nd Treatise, *Differentia* viii, of *De Magnis Conjunctionibus*, where one reads: *dixerunt quia Saturnus habuit significationem super hamfi* (f. C viii r.). A marginal gloss of the Code Ms. Vaticanus Reginensis Latinus 1285 containing this work (folios 43r.– 99v.: the gloss in question is in folio 58r. l.29) – written by the same IOANNIS HISPANUS according to R. LEMAY, *Abù Ma'shar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century*, Beirut 1962, p.14 n.4 - comments the expression as it follows: *Super legem illorum a quibus Mauri ducunt legem suam, id est ab illis qui fuerunt ab Abraam usque ad Moysen ex parte Ysmaelis*, i.e. *super legem Ismaelitarum*. A theoretical connection with Ismael's progeny, namely more in general with *Hunafà*’Gentiles, doubles therefore the other one previously acknowledged (1st Treatise, *Diff.* iv, f. A vii r.; Vat. Reg. Lat. 1285, f. 46 v. a) Saturn-Judaism. In fact “Abraham through Ishmael was the progenitor of the Arabs. He therefore must have been the founder of the religion of the *Hunafà*” (R. BELL, “Who were the Hanifs?”, *MW* 20 [1930], p.124). In reality, there was a mistake, because the original text – according to the new edition of YAMAMOTO-BURNETT – displays the word *khalifà*’caliphs” (Vol. I, p.152 l.8, ET p.153): but what might have given origin to the misunderstanding of the medieval translator, who exchanged a common term such as “caliphs” with a problematic one ?

We reproduce here a sketch-map of the main medieval sources treating the problem of the cosmic correspondences Planets – Religions, since the end of the IX century (Abù Ma'shar/Al-Kindi) till up the XIII century (Roger Bacon):

Placet	Abù Ma'shar (Al-Kindi)	De Planetarum patrociniis (CCAG VII)	Al-Birùni	Gàyat al-Hakim, III,1	Gàyat al-Hakim, III,7	Roger Bacon
Saturn	Judaism	Judaism	Judaism	(Judaism)	Judaism	Judaism
Jupiter	Faiths	Christianity	Christianity	Christianity	Christianity	Faiths
Mars	Paganism	Idolatry	Idolatry	Idolatry	Idolatry	Caldaean Religion
Sun	Idolatry	Religion of the	Magianism	Mazdaeism	Persian	Aegyptian

		Fire		.Brahamanism. Cult of Pneumatic Spirits	Religion	Religion. Cult of the Heavenly Army
Venus	Islam		Islam	Islam	Islam	Islam
Mercury	Christianity	Judaism. Debate about Dogmatism [Heterodoxy]	Heterodoxy	Heterodoxy (Zindik)	Religion of Wise men. Heresy	Christianity
Moon	Doubt, Development, Change and Desertion from one's Faith	Religion of the Greeks (Revelation of the Mysteries)	Adherents of the prevailing Religion [Sabianism]	Sabianism Revelation	Religion of the Children and of the Youths [Harrànian Sabianism]	Sect of the Antichrist

(Bibliographical references: ABU MA'SHAR, op. cit., I, p.44 f.; CCAG, VII, p.95 ff.; AL-BIRUNI, *Kitàb al-tafhìm* (*Book of Initiation in the Elements of the Art of Astrology*), p.253; *Gàyat al-hakim* (ref. below n.296), p.156 ff., and p.206 ff.; ROGER BACON, op. cit. (above n.161), p.253 ff.). The relation Moon-Sabians does not deserve any comment, if one keeps in mind the role of Harràn as cultic capital of the Sumero-Babylonian Moon-God *Sin*: by this point of view, it is not too hazardous to suppose that the expression “the Religion of *the Children and of the Youths*”, explicitly connected by the *Gàya* with Sabianism, may be a textual error: the writing of the Arabic words *al-sabiàn wa- l-ahdàth*, in fact, is indeed very similar to the expression “the Sabians of Harràn” (*al-sàbiya bi-l-Harràn*) so that the former graphic sequence may easily changed with the latter. On the other hand, how can one explain the presence of such subjects as “the children and the youths” in this context ?

196) Cf. above p.2 and n.15; below p.33 and ns. 291-2 .

197) AL-BIRUNI, *Kitàb al-tafhìm*, p.253.

198) Cf. above n.116; p.18 and n.149. The circumstance that God-Fearers in certain Diaspora communities attended at synagoge's assemblies “nicht als ‘Anhänge’, sondern als - gegenüber Juden und Proselyten freilich ungleichwertige - Bestandteile der jüdischen Gemeinden” (BELLEN, “*Synagogé tès Ioudaìon kai Theosebòn*”, p.172), makes SIMON think that “das stunde ziemlich in Analogie zu den Katechumenen der Alten Kirche, nur mit dem Unterschied dass der Katechumenat ein vorläufiger Stand ist, während bestimmte, ja sogar der Grossteil der *sebòmenoi* ihren Status das ganze Leben behalten” (art. “Gottesfürchtiger”, col.1068). It is interesting to notice a gloss to the word “Sabian” found in one Ms. of a summarized version of TABARÌ's *Tafsìr* (*Tarjama i tafsìr i Tabarì*, ed. H. Yaghmài, IV, p.1054) by De BLOIS, “Sabians in Arabia”, p.52 n.52, according to which *Sàbi'ùn* = *Nighòshagàn*, i.e. a Persian word usually employed for denoting “Manichaean hearers” (it is well-known that Manichaeans divided the believers into a number of grades, the “hearers” being separated from “initiates” and having consequently a role similar to Christian *katekhòumenoi*), even if obviously we disagree with the French scholar's opinion about the identity Sabians-Manichaeans; this fact does not mean, however, that the term *Sàbi'ùn* could not sometimes have included also Manichaean groups in Central Arabia and in the neighbouring regions. For the Christianizing of the term *prosèlytos* see P.B. BAGATTI, *The Church from Circumcision. History and Archaeology of Judaeo-Christians*, ET by E. HOACLE, Jerusalem 1971, pp.237-39, and also (with J.T. MILIK) *Gli scavi del Dominus Flevit (Monte Oliveto – Gerusalemme)*, I, Jerusalem 1958, p.21: the author supposes that the Judaeo-Christians had an institution called “Proselitate”, similar to a “Catechumenate”, but his hypothesis is considered quite hazardous. In *The Church from Circumcision*, p.210 figs. 13, 17 and 13, 20, Bagatti also records, in a funerary context, the symbol *S B* + which he reads in the same way tentatively proposed by Du MESNIL Du BOISSON, *MUSJ* 1959, namely that it “se lit vraiseblament *S(otèr) B(oethòs) + (= Khristòs)*” (p.39, cf. p.42 no.138), who reproduced in addition the sequences, in Greek letters, *Z a b* (“au dessous, une palme dressée”) (p.16 no.34), and *Z b E* (p.31 no.104), which evidently contradict a similar possibility.

199) Cf above p.15 and ns.70-1 for a subtle theoretical distinction between these terms.

200) As we have said (above p.1 and n.2), that is the sense by which we assume the expression following MITCHELL, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos”, p.119.

201) The Oracle was firstly published by G.E. BEAN, *Journey in Northern Lycia 1965-67*, D. Ak. Wien Phil.-Hist. Klasse 104 (1971), pp.20-2 no.37; see the fine commentary by L. ROBERT, “Un Oracle Gravé à Oenoanda”, in *Opera Minora Selecta*, V, Amsterdam 1972, pp.617-39 (previously published in *CRAI* 1971); for a discussion about the Oracle here quoted, whose first three lines are also reproduced into the so-called *Theosophy of Tübingen* (late V c. C.E.) as well as into LACTANTIUS’ *Divinae Institutiones* (1, 7), see MITCHELL, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos”, p.86 ff., where also the original Greek text and its translation are given.

202) The migration of these sects from Palestine has been often put in doubt: see for example E. PETERSON, “Urchristentum und Mandäismus (Nachtrag)”, *ZNW* 27 (1928), pp.91-98. We wish to recall here that CHWOLSON’s identification (cf. *Die Ssabier’s Index*, s.vs.) of the religious group called by al-NADIM, *Fihrist*, ET p.811, the *Mughtasila* (“Those who wash themselves”), or *Sàbat al-batà’ih*, with the Elkesaites and the Mandaeans is valid only for the former group, as the discovery of the so-called *Mani-Codex* has demonstrated once for all: *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex ... kritische Edition ... herausgegeben und übersetzt von Ludwig LOENEN und Cornelia ROMER, Papyrologica coloniensi* 14, Opladen 1988.

203) On the Jews in Babylonia, also during the Persian period, see the up-to-date bibliography in SCHURER-VERMES-MILLAR-GOODMAN, *The History of the Jewish People*, III, § 31 ns.11 ff.

204) Antiochus settled two thousand Jewish families in Lydia and Phrygia: granting them the right to follow their own laws and other privileges. JOSEPHUS, *Ant. Jud.*, 12, 149-50, quotes the relevant passages of the letter of the king to his governor Zeuxis: for the authenticity of this document, see the discussion in SCHURER-VERMES-MILLAR-GOODMAN, *The History of the Jewish People*, III, 1, p.17 n.33; TREBILCO, *Jewish Communities*, p. 5 ff.

205) We limit ourselves to quote again TREBILCO’s book, where large space is reserved to the most important Jewish communities in Asia Minor (Sardi, Priene, Acmonia, Apamea), with exhaustive bibliography.

206) See REYNOLD-TANNEMBAUM, *Jews and God-Fearers*, pp.116-23, for a detailed analysis of “the trade designations” in Aphrodisia’s inscription.

207) REYNOLDS-TANNEMBAUM, op. cit.: for the mention of *prosèlytos* see p.5, face A, ll.13, 17, 22 (“The important fact that 3 persons are explicitly called proselytes ... in a period in which Jewish proselytism was forbidden by imperial decree, is a strong testimony of the powerful influence of the Jewish community of Aphrodisia”: P. W. Van der HORST, *Essays on the Jewish World of Early Christianity*, p.171 [from the study “Jews and Christians in Aphrodisia in the Light of Their Relations in Other Cities of Asia Minor” contained in the same volume, pp.166-81, and firstly published in *NedTTs* 43 (1989) pp.106-21]): Commentary pp.43-48, where also the problem of the imperial legislation is treated.

208) Cf. the previous note, and above p.12 and ns. 90-92.

209) Cf. above p.14 and n.113.

210) See the last two lines of the Oracle (refs. above n.201). The adjective *epòptes*, “all-seeing”, is usually attributed to Helios (cf. S. MITCHELL, *Anatolia: Land, Men and Gods in Asia Minor*, II, Oxford 1993, p.47), even if it is also applied to *Theòs Hypsistos* in a dedicatory formula from an Alexandria’s inscription virtually conflating the Highest god and the Sun god, or in another one from a Pergamum altar completely associating both divinities (dedication to *Helios Theos Hypsistos*): texts in MITCHELL, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos”, nos. 284 and 186.

211) Being collected within *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani (CIRB)*, eds. V.V. STRUVE *et alii*, Moskow-Leningrad 1965, and firstly published by V.V. LATYSHEV in Russian, these inscriptions – as it is well-known – represent the key-stone of the old and influential study of E. SCHURER, “Die Juden im Bosporanische Reiche und die Genossenschaften der *sebòmenoi theòn hypsiston* ebendasselbst”, *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, I, 1897, pp.220-5, but above all of the already quoted “Les Mystères de Sabazius et le Judaïsme” of CUMONT, who pointed out to the syncretistic features of these religious communities and whose conclusions had been accepted and discussed by many scholars after him: E.R. GOODENOUGH, “The Bosphorus Inscriptions to the Most High God”, *JQR* 47

(1956-7), pp.1-44; B. LIFSHITZ, “Le Culte du Dieu Très Haut à Gorgippia”, *RFIC* 92 (1964), pp.157-61; M. TATCHEVA HITOVA “On the Cult of Theos Hypsistos on the Bosphorus” (in Russian), *VDI* 1 (1978), pp.133-42 (cf. *SEG* 28 [1978], p.1648); MITCHELL, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos”, pp.133-5 (nos.83-104), are only few examples. A good edition and translation of the texts can be found in LEVINSKAYA, *The Book of Acts in Its 1 c. Setting* (Appendix 3), pp.226-46.

212) J. USTINOVA, “The Thiasoi of Theos Hypsistos in Tanais”, *HR*, 31 (1991), pp.150-80 (cf. *SEG* 42 [1992], p.726); Eadem, *The Supreme Gods of the Bosporan Kingdom*, p.183 ff. (“Cult Associations on the Bosphorus”). For a widespread tendency to solar Monotheism in Late Antiquity, the classical study of F. CUMONT, *La Théologie Solaire du Paganisme Romain*, Paris 1909, is still to be considered a reference mark. For the solar character of the Harranian popular religion, see TUBACH, *Im Schatten des Sonnengottes*, *passim*.

213) *CIJ*, I, 2, nos. 5, 285, 524, 529, 642; (M. STERN, *GLAJJ* II, p.105, thought that *metuens* could be only an abridgment of the fuller formula *deum metuens* and hence was definitely used technically: “It is hard to conceive that either *metuens* or *sebòmenos* is used in the general sense of ‘religious’ ”). The participles *metuens* and *timens* can also be found in Christian inscriptions (E. DIEHL, *ILCV*, Berlin 1961, nos. 3359a, 3416a, 4779, 6 [*metuens*], 1339-41, 1172 [*timens*]): in both cases, however, the formula would actually refer to God-fearers. For a Latin transcription of the Greek *theosebès* into Latin letters, cf. J.B. FREY, *CIJ*, I, 2, Città del Vaticano 1936, no.228 (= D. NOY, *JIWE*, II, no.207, Rome: Eparchia *theosebès*; but cf. FELDMAN, “Jewish ‘Sympathizers’ in Classical Literature and Inscriptions”, p.204 n.24: “Frey, who is very eager to find ‘sympathizers’ in his inscriptions, is wrong in not recognizing a possible one here”), and *CIJ* I, 2, LIFSHITZ, *Prolegomenon* no.619a (= *JIWE*, I, no.113, Venosa: Marcus *teuseves*; cf. B. LIFSHITZ, “Les Juifs à Venosa”, *RFIC*, 90 [N.S. 40] [1962], pp.367-71). For a discussion, besides ROMANIUK, “Die ‘Gottesfurchtigen’ im Neuen Testament”, *passim*, and LAKE, “Proselytes and God-Fearers”, *BC*, *passim*, see LEVINSKAYA, *The Book of Acts in Its 1 c. Setting*, pp.68-70. The references to *metuen(te)s* are collected by SCHURER-VERMES-MILLAR-GOODMAN, *The History of the Jewish People*, III, 1, p.168 n.74. For literary evidence, see below n.217. The term *Theosebès* is an equivalent of *Sebòmenos* (*tòn theòn*): normally in inscriptions the former is preferred because of its shorter form.

214) God-Fearers in *Acts*. Chap. x: description of a model God-Fearer, *i.e.* the centurion Cornelius denoted as *eusebès kai phobòmenos tòn theòn* expressing his piety by means of almsgiving and constant praying (x, 2) and enjoying a good reputation among Jews (x, 22). It is worth noting with PINES, “The Iranian Name for Christians and God-Fearers”, p.147, as “according to the Acts of the Apostles, the first Gentile converted to Christianity was one of the God-fearers”. Cornelius’ episode is the turning point of the book: from here, *Acts* is the history of this mission. xiii, 16 (*phobòmenoi tòn theòn*); 43 (*sebòmenoi prosèlytoi*): the passage has been long discussed, because of its apparent self-contradiction, the words used here by Luke denoting two different classes of believers. Generally two solutions to the problem have been proposed: the first one is that *prosèlytoi* is a wrong word, namely an ancient gloss or “a careless expression” (KUHN-STEGEMANN, *RE*, Suppl. IX, col.1253; KUHN, *TWNT*, VI [1968], p.743; E. HAENCHEN, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, in *Kritische-exegetische Kommentar über das Neue Testament*, III, Gottingen 1959, p.355 n.5 [ET, Oxford 1971, p.413 n.5]; ROMANIUK, *loc. cit.*, p.81; LIFSHITZ, “Du Nouveau sur les Sympathisants”, p.80; H. CONZELMANN, *Acts of the Apostles*, Philadelphia 1987, p.106); the second coincides with the position of the scholars who reject any technical sense of the word *sebòmenoi* (FOAKES-JACKSON, *BC*, V, p.88; WILCOX, “The ‘God-Fearers’ in Acts: A Reconsideration”, p.181 f.). But particularly worth of interest is a third possibility, namely the suggestion of LEVINSKAYA, *The Book of Acts in Its 1 c. Setting*, p.47, who argues “that *prosèlytos* is used here in the same manner as in Matthew in a basic ‘verbal’ sense of ‘coming to any-thing new’”: she had in fact checked a semantic value of the term/verb *prosèlytos/proserkhetai* present in some Christian texts such as the *Homiliae* of ASTERIUS OF AMASEA, the *Praescriptio* of MARIA OF CASSOBELA, and a passage of CLEMENS OF ALEXANDRIA, where “alongside the traditional meaning there began to develop another one, namely ‘a convert to Christianity’ ”, hence the more general “idea of approaching anything new”, by which interpretation obviously all contradictions cease to exist); 50; xvii, 14; xvii, 4, 17; xvii, 17; xviii, 6-7 (*sebòmenoi [tòn theòn]* and *sebòmenoi Hèllenes*: the abridged formula *oi sebòmenoi* could also be explained by the commandment of not naming in vain God: cf. J. KLAUSNER, *Von Jesus zu Paulus*, Jerusalem-Amsterdam 1950, p.55; LIFSHITZ, *ibidem*). We should add to these items three passages mentioning “Greeks” (xiv, 1, xviii, 4 and xix, 10: *Ioudaïous kai Hellenas*), whose identity is certainly not different from the *sebomènon Hèllènon* previously mentioned in xvii, 4 (cf. REYNOLDS-TANNEMBAUM, *Jews and God-Fearers*, p.51). For other direct or indirect Greek literary references to God-Fearers (Epictetus, Filo, Josephus), see BERTRAM, art. “Theosebès”, *TWNT* III, p.123 ff.; COHEN, “Respect for Judaism by Gentiles According to Josephus”, pp.416-9 (who counts as many as five instances

in *AJ*: 3, 217; 3, 318-9; 20, 34; 20, 41; 20, 195; and four in *BJ*: 2, 454; 2, 463; 2, 560; 7, 45); MARCUS, “The *Sebòmenoi* in Josephus”, pp.247-50. Talmudic references to *yere’i ash-shamayyim* (“Heaven Fearers”, where “Heaven” is the traditional metonymy for God) are collected and discussed by I. LEVY, “Le Proselytisme Juif”, *REJ* 50 (1905), pp.1-9; 51 (1906), pp.29-31; and by SIEGERT, “Gottesfürchtiger”, pp.110-27; add REYNOLDS-TANNEMBAUM, op. cit., p.48 f. and notes; FELDMAN, “Jewish Sympathizers”, p.207 f.; and the lemma *jàre’*, *TWAT*, s.v.

215) EPIPHANIUS, *Panarion*, 80, 1-2, compares Messalians’ places of prayer with extra-mural Jewish sanctuaries, like the cultic place outside the city walls where Paul met the God-fearing Lydia, or another one built by the Samaritans in the shape of an open-air theatre, adding that they also used buildings similar to churches: cf. below p.26.

216) *Acts*, xviii, 6.

217) Above in the text and n. 209.

218) For “The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem”, see K. LAKE’s *Note XVI*, in *BC*, I, 5, pp.195-212.

219) *Acts*, xv, 19-20.

220) For the equivalence *ger(ei) toshàb – ger(ei) ash-sha’ar – ben(ei) Noah*, cf. SCHURER-VERMES-MILLAR-GOODMAN, *The History of the Jewish People*, III, 1, p.171; STRACK-BILLERBECK, *Komm. z. NT*, II, p.722 f.; MOORE, *Judaism*, I, p.341; REYNOLDS-TANNEMBAUM, op. cit., p.48 f. and 58 f.

221) *Talmud*: ‘*Aboda Zara*, (8, 4) 64b; *Sanhedrin*, 56a; *Ger.* 3, 1; cf. the arts. “Laws (Noachian)”, *JE* VII, pp.648-50 and “Noachite Laws”, *EJ* XII, cols. 1190-1; see also J. BONSIIVEN, *Le Judaïsme Palestinien au Temps de Jesus-Christ*, I, Paris 1934, p.251; KLAUSNER, *Von Jesus zu Paulus*, p.345. We reproduce the list given by REYNOLDS-TANNEMBAUM, op. cit., p.59, and their relative remarks: “What were the seven commandments? On the one hand, we find commandments against 1) idolatry; 2) incest; 3) murder; 4) profanation of the name of God; 5) robbery; 6) a positive commandment on the duty to form instruments of justice; 7) a ban of eating parts cut out of living animals. On the other hand we are told that the tanna’itic school of Manasseh omitted from the Noachite commandments those on the courts and on blasphemy (nos. 6 and 4 above), and substituted prohibitions of emasculation and ‘forbidden mixture’ (of plants, in ploughing, etc.)”.

222) Cf. for example *The Book of Jubilees*, 7, 20 ff., which hands down a quite different list. The set of prescriptions contained in *Acts*, xv, 19-20 (and repeated in the next passage 28-9), however, is specially worth of attention, since it “is the only one that bears any systematic relationship to the set of religious laws which the Pentateuch makes obligatory upon resident aliens” (“Noachite Laws”, col.1190); cf. also *Ps. Clementines*, PG II, col.221.

223) “The Apostolic decree, a rule agreed at the Apostolic Council where Paul, Peter and others met to discuss the extent to which the gentile converts to Christianity had to follow Jewish Law, is currently agreed by many to be a kind of Christian God-fearers’ rule” (REYNOLDS-TANNEMBAUM, op. cit., p.61, with bibliographical references at n.261); cf. SIMON, *Verus Israel*, p.392: “Le décret apostolique, fixant comme condition à l’admission des Gentils la pratique des precepts dits noachiques, se place dans la même ligne de la propagande juive”.

224) A fundamental correspondence between these different categories of people are also suggested by the English translator of the *Sirah*, A. GUILLAUME who, when commenting ibn Ishàq’s portrait of Zayd, pointed out that “the influence of the Jewish formula, taken over by early Christianity, is clear” (*The Life of Muhammad*, p.99 n.2). Cf. however above, p.21 f. and ns. 188-192.

225) See the authors and the works quoted by CHWOLSON, *Die Sabier*, II, p.563 (cf. I, p.271 and n.1), and p.592 f. (cf. GREEN, *The City of the Moon-God*, p.13); add Khalil ibn Ahmad who, according to al-Qurtubi, ibn Kathir and ibn Hayyàn, states that “the Sabians believe that they belong to the religion of the prophet Noah” (quoted by GUNDUZ, *The Knowledge of Life*, p.25).

226) For textual references to ibn al-Kalbi, Yàqùt and Bar Hebraeus, see again CHWOLSON, op. cit., II, p.553 and p.549 f. (cf. I, p.311), who, in relation to Bar Hebraeus, mentions Sem’s son Arpakshad, whereas

in BUDGE's translation of the *Chronicon* (cit. above n.159), p.7, one finds out the name of Noah's nephew Shàlàh. AL-TABARI, on the other hand, in his *History* claims that *Sàbi* is another name of Lamech, the father of Noah (*Ta'rikh al rasul wa al-mulùk*, ed. M.J. De GOEJE, repr. Leiden 1964, I, p.178 [ET *The History of al-Tabari*, New York 1987]: the great poligraph accepts this derivation of the name *Sàbi'ùn* from an eponymous hero together with the other one proposed by him in his *Tafsir*: see below p.30 and n.271); cf. AL-ASH'ARI, *Tashil al-sabil*, Comm. ad *Sùra* 2, 59 (quoted by CHWOLSON, II, p.563, cf. I, p.271). For the opinion that the Sabians claim to be followers of the religion of Noah, see AL-TUSI, *al-Tibiyàn fi tafsir al-Qur'àn*, I, ed. Najaf 1376 H./1956, p.282 (Comm. ad *Sùra* 2, 62); KASHANI, *Minhaj al-sàdiqin fi ilzàm al-mukhàlifin*, III, ed. Teheran 1346 H.S./1927, p.283 (Comm. ad *Sùra* 2, 62): cf. Mc AULIFFE, "Exegetical Identification of the *Sàbi'ùn*", p.97 and p.100; add the modern Muslim lexicographers quoted by CHWOLSON, II, p.592 f. , and the authors cited in the previous note.

227) GREGORIUS OF NAZIANZUS, *Or.*, 18, 5 (PG 35, 989D ff.). For *Pantokrator*, see SCHURER, "Die Juden im Bosporianischen Reiche", p.221; HORSLEY, *New Documents*, I, p.137 and III, p.118. A cult of *Zeus Pantokrator* has been recently identified in Bytina, *I. Nicaea* II, 1, no.1121; 2, no.1512.: the editor of these inscriptions, S. SAHIN, has rightly pointed out the relation of this cult to the worship of *Theos Hypsistos*. It must be remembered that the designation "Hypsistarii", as well as "Hypsistiani", was not adopted by the worshippers themselves: it was a label applied by outsiders to them (cf. MITCHELL, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos", p.96).

228) The adjective is borrowed from TCHERIKOVER, ref. below n.229.

229) Firstly published by HICKS, *JHS* 12 (1891), p.236; W. DITTENBERGER ed., *OGIS*, Leipzig 1903-1905, p.573. On Sabbatistai, see the art. of GRESSMANN, *RE*, s.v., and the discussion of TCHERIKOVER, "The Sambathions", p.46 f. (= *Scripta Hierosolymitana* I, p.81 f.); cf also FELDMAN, "Proselyters and 'Sympathizers' ", p.278.

230) TCHERIKOVER, op. cit., p.47. The author explains also the real nature of the *Sambatheion* mentioned in a II/III c. C.E. inscription from Tiatira (*IGR* IV, no.1281; *CIJ* II, no.752); cf. SCHURER-VERMES-MILLAR-GOODMAN, *The History of the Jewish People*, III, 1, p.53.

231) GREGORIUS OF NYSSA, *Eun.*, 2 (PG 45, 481D – 484A). For funerary epitaphs of two possible Hypsistarians in Phrygia, see MITCHELL, *Anatolia*, p.50; R.L. FOX, *Pagans and Christians*, Viking 1986, p.404; LEVINSKAYA, *The Book of Acts in Its 1 c. Setting*, p.101f. and n.107.

232) Both groups were known by a number of additional names such as *Martyriani*, *Enthusiastae* etc. About Messalians see *PS*, Part I, Vol. 3: *Liber Graduum*, ed. M. KMOSKO, Paris 1926, cxv-cxlix (Discussion), clxx-cxcxii (Ancient Testimonia). The Christian sect was condemned by synods at Side and Constantinople (cf. G.W.H. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961, p.833, for textual references): close affinities with Christianity result for example from their adoption of a martyr cult. On the other hand, close similarities with Judaism emerge just from the name of their places of worship, because *proseuche* occurs almost exclusively in Jewish contexts: a good analysis of the word is given by M. HENGEL, "Proseuche und Synagoge: Judische Gemeinde, Gotteshaus und Gottesdienst in der Diaspora und in Palastina", in *Tradition und Glaube: Festgabe fur K.G. Kuhn*, Gottingen 1971, pp.157-83 (= *The Synagogue, Studies in Origins, Archaeology and Architecture*, ed. J. GUTMANN, New York 1975, pp.110-48); see also L. ROBERT, *Opera Minora Selecta*, II, Amsterdam 1969, p.1611; SCHURER-VERMES-MILLAR-GOODMAN, *The History of the Jewish People*, II (1979), p.425 f. n.4 and p.439 f. n.61. The word is used to denote sanctuaries of *Theos Hypsistos* in the Bosporan Kingdom, on Delos, in Galatia, in Hellenistic Egypt (Athribis): references in MITCHELL, "The Cult of Theos Hypistos", nos.85, 88, 109, 202, 285; discussion in HORSLEY, *New Documents*, III, p.121, IV, p.201.

233) EPIPHANIUS, *Pan.*, 80, 1-3 (*GCS, Epiphanius*, ed. K. HOLL, III, pp.485-8).

234) CYRILLUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *De Ador. in Sp. et Ver.*, 3, 92 (PG 68, 281 BC).

235) The first law was issued in the names of Honorius, Arcadius and Theodosius II, and the second one in the names of Honorius and Theodosius II: texts and translation in A. LINDER, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, cit. (above n.92), pp.226-36 and pp.256-62. Both were preserved in the Theodosian Code (16, 5, 43; 16, 8, 19), as well as in *Codex Justinianus* (1, 9, 12).

236) AUGUSTINUS, *Epist.* 44, 6, 13. The date of the letter may be the year 396, 397 or even 398. The title *Maior* refers often to the leaders of the Jewish communities, cf. LINDER, op. cit., p.256. About the *Caelicolae*, we signalize again the excellent “Un Document du Syncretisme Religieux dans l’Afrique Romaine” of SIMON (cit. above n.72), which represents also one of the rare studies into the matter.

Augustine seems to disagree with the usual Christian interpretation of *tertium genus* = Christians, since he proposes on the contrary an idea neither distant from our point of view about God-Fearers, nor with Muslim prophethology. About the Biblical episod of the Arch, the Saint in fact writes what follows: *Jam vero quod Noe homini justo, et sicut de illo Scriptura veridica loquitur, in sua generatione perfecto (Gen., 6, 9), imperat Deus, ut arcam faciat, in qua cum suis ... liberaretur a diluvii vastitate; procul dubio figura est peregrinantis in hoc saeculo civitatis Dei, hoc est Ecclesiae, quae fit salva per lignum, in quo pependit Mediator Dei et hominum homo Christus Jesus (I Tim. 2, 5) ... Et caetera quae in ejusdem arcae constructione dicuntur, ecclesiasticarum signa sunt rerum ... Exempli gratia, velut si quispiam quod hic scriptum est, “inferiora bicamerata et tricamerata facies eam” (Gen. 6, 16); non quod ego in illo opeee dixi [Contr. Faust., 12, 16], velit intelligi; quia ex omnibus gentibus Ecclesia congregatur, bicameratam dictam propter duo genera hominum, circumcisionem scilicet et praeputium, quod Apostolus et alio modo dicit Judaeos et Graecos (Rom. 3, 9); tricameratam vero, eo quod omnes gentes de tribus filiis Noe post dilvium reparatae sunt: sed aliud dicat aliquid, quod a fidei regula non sit alienum. Nam quoniam non solas in inferioribus mansiones habere arcam voluit, verum etiam in superioribus, et haec dixit bicamerata; et in superioribus superiorum et haec appellavit tricamerata: ut ab imo sursum versus tertia consurgeret habitatio (De Civ. Dei, 15, 26; we underline).*

237) It is important to note that in the law issued in 409 C.E. the measures against the *Caelicolae* (above p.26 and n.235) were followed by a reiteration of the prohibitions of proselytism: see above p.12 and ns.88-92.

238) *Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis*, ed. F.H. SCRIVENER, Cambridge 1864: *Acts* xiii, 50: ... *caelicolas mulieres honestas*; xvii, 4: ... *multi caelicolarum et graecorum multitudo magna*, where the translator introduces a distinction between God-Fearers and the other Greeks which is absent in the original version. In the *Vulgata* (beginnings V century), St. JEROME generally translates *sebòmenoi* with *colentes* and *phoboùmenoi* with *metuentes*.

239) SCHURER, “Die Juden im Bosporanischen Reiche”, p.224 f. A substantial identity between Hysistarians and Sabians, although within a horizon of research different from ours, had been proposed long ago by G. BOEHMER, *De Hysistariis*, Berlin 1824, p.2 ff. and pp.59-85; unfortunately, *non vidimus* the study with the same title published little earlier (1823) by C. ULLMANN in Heidelberg.

240) “Il n’est pas exclu que nous soyons ici au carrefour, mal délimité, de trois religions”: it was in such terms that SIMON, for example, defined the religious context of the North-African lamp studied by him in the essay cited above (n.236 and n.72), p.515, maintaining at the same time the equation *Caelicolae*-Hysistarians (“... les Caelicolae ne sont rien d’autre qu’une variété proprement africaine de sectateurs du Très Haut”, p.513). Cf. also P. ATHANASSIADI – M. FREDE, *Introduction to Pagan Monotheism* (cit. above n.4), p.17.

241) This point may be taken for granted: see for example the wide coordinates by which LIFSHITZ denoted God-Fearers, namely that they “n’étaient pas convertis au Judaïsme et n’observaient que le Sabbat et les ‘commandements de Noe’ ” (“Les Sympathisants”, p.78).

242) Some of these traditions are known by AL-TABARI, *Tafsir*, I (ref. above, n.41), p.319: Layt following Mujāhid, or, according to another *isnād*, al-Kāsīm b. Abī al-Bizza following Mujāhid: “the Sabians are not Jews nor Christians, they do not have any cult”; ibn Jurāyġ following Mujāhid: “the Sabians are a religious group between Jews and Magians, they do not have any cult”; Yūnus b. ‘Abd al-A’lā following ibn Wahb [‘Abdallāh b. Wahb] following ibn Zayd [Usāma b. Zayd]: “the Sabians ... say: ‘There is no god but God’, but they do not have any cult (‘amal), scripture and prophet, only this word: ‘There is no god but God’ ”. We use MARGOLIOUTH’s translation, art. “Harrānians”, p.519.

243) GUNDUZ, *The Knowledge of Life*, p. 36 f., argues that there is “nothing to oppose the account of ‘Abū Yūsuf ‘Absha’a [al-Qathī’i] found in *al-fihrist* and supported by some Muslim scholars, like al-Khawārizmī and Hamzah al-‘Isfahānī”: according to the scholar, in fact, “it is well known that during al-Ma’mūn’s reign there was no toleration of views on various subjects which were against the opinion of the central government. In that period there was presumably intolerance about the poll tax by contrast with earlier times, when there was great elasticity”. But such a reconstruction seems us a big distortion of the facts: it

corresponds noway to the truth that on the beginnings of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate, and in particular during al-Ma’mūn’s reign, there was “no toleration of views” in religious matters; on the contrary, just in the course of that period, the debate between different religious minorities and Islam was encouraged and supported by the same Caliph, who not seldom took part in these discussions which he himself liked to organize: in addition to the bibliographical references quoted above n.180, see *EF*, VI, s.v.

“(al-)Ma’mūn”, but especially IBN AL-BABUYYA, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, Teheran 1387 H./1967, p.430 f., containing the long and interesting controversy between a Sabian master, a certain ‘Imrān, and the famous doctor al-Ridā (the episode is quoted by G. MONNOT, “Sabéens et Idolâtres selon ‘Abd al-Jabbār”, *MIDEO* 12 [1974], p.28). In other words, we think that the adoption of the name “Sabians” by the Harrānians in the first quarter of the III H./IX c. C.E. is a quite natural issue of the need of defining their own doctrinal position in consequence of a change of policy by the Muslim government not in the name of intolerance, but in the name of inter-religious confrontation; likewise, the charge of idolatry, together with the other even more serious one of sacrificing human beings (not excepting children) raised against them belongs – as HJARPE, *Les Sabéens Harrāniens*, pp.96-131, has convincingly demonstrated comparing these calumnies with the similar ones by which Christians were previously charged – to the *repertoire* of religious polemics, being one of its most common and favourite arguments (about the unreliability of the *Fihrist*’s infamous tale, see also GREEN, *The City of the Moon-God*, p.120 ff., who furnishes a critical analysis of the historical sources. About the general problem of human sacrifices, the study “Menschenopfer bei den Arabern”, *Anthropos*, 53 (1958), pp.721-805 of J. HENNINGER, should always be taken into account). The idea of Christianity as apostasy is witnessed for example by ORIGEN, *C. Cels.*; cf. NOCK, *Conversion*, chap. X and notes to chap. XIII.

244) On the reliability of these earlier sources, see GUNDUZ, *The Knowledge of Life*, p.22 f. and n.48.

245) See J.M. FIEY, art. “Nasāra”, *EF* VII, pp.970-4. We must remember that the final choice of adopting the Greek (Latin) name “Christians” – firstly used at Antioch in the year 40 according to *Acts*, xi, 26 – instead of other epithets such as “Nazaraeans” or “Galilaeans” (both pointing at the geographical origin of Jesus, and mostly used by Jews for denoting his followers; the latter, in particular, is still systematically preferred by JULIAN, whose *Contra Galileos* is universally known) undercame a heavy historical development, as on the other hand the abundant bibliography about the subject quite evidently proves: F. BLASS, “*KHRESTIANOI-KHRISTIANOI*”, *Hermes* 30 (1895), pp.465-70; E. PETERSON, “Christianus”, in *Miscellanea Giovanni Moscati*, I, Citta del Vaticano (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana) 1946, pp.355-72; E.J. BICKERMAN, “The Name of Christians”, *HTR* 42 (1949), pp.109-44; J. MOREAU, “Les Nom des Chrétiens”, *La Nouvelle Clio* 1-2 (1949-50), pp.190-2; C. SPICQ, “Ce que Signifie le Titre de Chrétiens”, *ST* 15 (1961), pp.68-78; B. LIFSHITZ, “L’Origine du Nom des Chrétiens”, *VC* 16.2 (1962), pp.65-70; J. TAYLOR, “Why Were the Disciples First Called Christians at Antioch (*Acts* xi, 26) ?”, *RB* 101.1 (1994), pp.75-94. As far as the name *masihyyūn* (i.e. the Arabic transcription of the Greek *Khristianoī*, derived from the name of Christ, *al-Masih*) is concerned, it was employed only by Christians for naming themselves still in the VI H./XII century, according to AL-SAM’ANI, *Al-ansāb*, V, p.300; on the other hand, only one author, SULAYMĀN AL-GHAZZĪ, in his theological work, uses both *al-Nasrāniyya* and *al-Masihyya* for denoting Christians (quoted by FIEY, op. cit., p.971): however, the probability that Muhammad knew more than one Arabic term for “Christians” – leaving apart the problem whether one was used by non-Christians and another by Christians themselves for denoting their own faith, that is Christianity in general, or there existed more than one name for denoting different religious realities such as for example Judaeo-Christians and “orthodox” Christians – cannot absolutely ruled out: see below p.31 and ns. 279-81.

246) It is quite interesting – we believe – to remember here that the basic meaning of the Arabic word is just “(God-)Fearer”, sharing the same root of the verb *rahaba* = “to fear”, regularly employed also in a religious sense: besides Lexicons, cf. for instance SPENCER TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity among the Arabs*, p.144. The examples of a systematic linguistic correspondence God-Fearers/Christians during a long historical period are a host, as we shall see even better in the next pages. It seems us also worth of attention the Syriac term *Aksanàye* (= Greek *Xènoi*), “Strangers”, by which wandering ascetics – a typical form of expression of Syrian monasticism – were called, cf. *ibidem*, p.140.

247) SOZOMEN, *H.E.*, I, chap.12, and other Greek-writing historians use the word “Philosophy” as well as the related verb for denoting both the theoretic and practical aspects of the anchoritic monasticism, and in fact it was by this term that the Monastic Way was generally known by people. “While Greek controversialists in fact became all the more bitter, Aramaeans and Copts abandoned any intellectual attempt to reconcile the conflict between the exoteric and esoteric elements in the Christian tradition in order to

pursue practical ways by which the false duality could be overcome, hence they called it ‘the Christian philosophy’ and ‘to philosophize’ meant ‘to pursue the monastic way’ “ (SPENCER TRIMINGHAM, op. cit., p.66 f.; cf. p.102 n.23 and p.256).

248) It is not by chance that one of the few Christians with whom Muhammad came personally into contact was just a monk, namely the learned anchorite Bahira whom the Prophet would have encountered during his journey to Bostra. This legendary episode is often recorded by Medieval Muslim sources: IBN ISHAM, *Sirah*, ET pp.79-81; IBN SA’AD, *Tabaqàt* (ref. above, n.192), I, 1, p.76; AL-TABARI, *Ta’rikh* (ref. above, n.226), I, pp.1223-5; AL-MAS’UDI, *Murùj*, ed. and FT by C. PELLAT, Paris 1965, I, p.83, is the only writer to recognize that *Bahira* is an epithet, as the word in reality is (deriving from Syriac *bhira* which is just a title commonly employed for addressing monks): cf. the lemma “Bahira”, *EP* I, and also below n.260.

249) We do not know any monograph exclusively devoted to this important community: moreover, books such as for example the already cited FIEY’s *Communautés Syriaques en Iran et Iraq*, NAU’s *Les Arabes Chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie*, or SPENCER TRIMINIGHAM’s *Christianity among the Arabs*, provide indeed a very meagre information about it (in spite of – sometimes - the numerous references to it: in the last case at pp.156, 171, 196, 225, 226, 243, 278). Cf. also C.M. NALLINO, *Raccolta di Scritti*, Vol. III, Roma 1940, p.139 f.; other bibliographical material is furnished by the lemmas “Nasturiyyùn” (B. HOLMBERG), and “al-Hira” (IRFAN SHAHID), *EP* VII, pp. 1033-5, and III, p.478 f., whereas the lemma “(al-)Ibàd” is unfortunately useless. For the expression “Servants of God”, see below n.337.

250) Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 110-14 H./ 728-32 C.E.), according to IBN QATAYBAH, *Al-ma’arif*, ed. Cairo 1934, p.202; IBN KATHIR, *Tafsir*, ed. Cairo 1376 H./1956, I, p.104; and to ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Zayd (d. 182 H./798 C.E.), cf. AL-TABARI, *Tafsir*, I, p.319; IBN KATHIR, op. cit., I, p.104; ABU AL-FARAJ, *Tafsir*, ed. Beirut 1384 H./1964, I, p.92; IBN HAYYAN, *Tafsir*, ed. Riyàd n.d., I, p.239. It is worth noting that this person is one of the sources of al-Tabari (who mentions him simply as “al-Zayd”), to whom is also due the relevant information that the Sabians lived in *Jazirat al-Mawsil* (i.e. the region around Mosul in Northern Mesopotamia), as MARGOLIOUTH, art. “Harrànians”, p.519, had stressed for demonstrating that just at this early date – namely almost fifty years before the date proposed by the *Fihrist*’s famous tale - the Harranians were called “Sabians”: the scholar claimed in fact that “the region around Mosul” is an acceptable geographical approximation for Harràn; cf. GREEN, *The City of the Moon-God*, p.106 (who dates back Zayd’s death to 770, so that the link between Harràn and the Sabians can be established at least 75 years before al-Ma’mùn’s visit). Indeed, one should perhaps keep in mind that “in the time of the emperor Julian (361-3) the anchorite movement was widely extended and the region of Tùr ‘Abdin [the large mountainous plateau running just South of Harràn in the direction of Mosul] had already acquired that name which means ‘Mountain of the Servants of God’, because of the number of its ascetics and cenobitic groupings” (SPENCER-TRIMINGHAM, op. cit., p.126).

251) ‘Abd Rahman ibn Zayd, according to the Muslim sources quoted in relation to him in the previous note.

252) Khalil ibn ‘Ahmad (d. 170 H./786-7), according to AL-QURTUBI, *Al-jami’ al-‘ahkàm al-Qur’àn*, ed. Cairo 1387 H./1967, I, p.434; IBN KATHIR, loc. cit.; IBN HAYYAN, loc. cit.; cf. CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier*, I, p.188.

253) Qatàdah (d. 118 H./ 736), according to AL-NAYSABURI, *Gharàyb al-Qur’àn wa raghàyb al-furqàn*, ed. Cairo 1381 H./1962, I, p.333..

254) Hasan al-Basrì (d. 110 H./728), according to AL-QURTUBI, loc. cit.; IBN HAYYAN, loc. cit.; Abù al-Zanàd (d. 130 H./747), according to IBN KATHIR, loc. cit. (in reality Abù al-Zanàd states that the Sabians pray towards Yaman, i.e. the South).

255) Qatàdah, according to AL-TABARI, op. cit., I, p.320; AL-QURTUBI, loc. cit.; IBN KATHIR, loc. cit.; Khalil, according to AL-QURTUBI, loc. cit.; IBN KATHIR, loc. cit.; IBN HAYYAN, loc. cit.; Hasan al-Basrì, according to IBN KATHIR, loc. cit.; ABU AL-FARAJ, loc. cit.; ibn Abi Nujayh (d. 132 H./749), and Suddi (d. 128 H./745), according to IBN KATHIR, loc. cit.; IBN HAYYAN, loc. cit. Other Muslim personalities confirm that Sabians worship the angels (Abù Yusuf [d. 182 H./798], Muhammad ibn Hasan [d. 189 H./804]; cf. ABU LAYTH AL-SAMARQANDI, *Tafsir*, Suleymaniye Library, Fatih Bolumu Nu: 227, ed. Istanbul, I, p.19B) and read *zabur* (Abù al-‘Aliyah [d. 90 H./708], Rabi’ ibn ‘Anas al-Basrì [d. 139 H./756], according to AL-BUKHARI, *Al-jàmi’ al-sahih*, ed. Istanbul 1981, I, p.90; AL-QURTUBI, loc. cit.; IBN KATHIR, loc. cit.; IBN HAYYAN, loc. cit.).

256) Abù al-Zanàd, according to IBN KATHIR, loc. cit.; Ziyàd ibn Abihì, according to IBN KATHIR, loc. cit.

257) Abù al-Zanàd, according to IBN KATHIR, loc. cit.; Ziyàd ibn Abihì, according to IBN KATHIR, loc. cit.; Qatàdah, according to the same sources quoted in relation to him above n.255.

258) Abù al-Zanàd, according to IBN KATHIR, loc. cit. It is convenient to recall here – in relation to points 5, 7, 8 and 9 - the quite strange picture of the Sabianism drawn by IBN HAZM, op. cit. (above n.188), p. 34 ff., according to whom it would have had many rites and practices in common with Islàm. According to our sources of information about it (and in particular AL-NADÌM and AL-BÌRÙNÌ's cultic *Calendars*), however, we must acknowledge that the religion of the Harrànians fits well with all these elements, excepting the reading of the *Psalms*: the question of having no cult, scripture or prophet(s), on the other hand, deserves a more detailed analysis which we are going to perform in the next pages.

259) It is the case of Ziyàd ibn Abihì, Hasan al-Basrì, Qatàdah, Abù al-Zanàd, Khalil ibn Ahmad, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abù Yusuf and Muhammad ibn Hasan.

260) Taking into account its Monotheistic character, the possession of a Holy Book and the acknowledgment of a Prophet, in fact, their religion, as well as the doctrine of the Elkesaites/*Mughtasila/Sàbat al-Batàih*, no doubt is consistent with the features of the "People of the Book" and consequently with those of the group designated as the "Sabians", mostly because Muhammad himself "may not have fully understood the practices and beliefs of the people he called by that name" (GREEN, *The City of the Moon-God*, p.105). Despite the identification Sabians = Mandaeans of which he appears to be convinced, J. THOMAS himself, who consecrated a study to *Le Mouvement Baptiste en Palestine et en Syrie* (Gembloux 1935), had to recognize that the latter group – in consequence of its peripheral position and of the small number of its members - could never attract the attention of the Prophet nor let him consider the Mandaean sect in terms of a cult as important as Christianity and Judaism: "Il est clair cependant que la secte sabéenne des auteurs arabes (nos Mandéens) ... n'aurait pas, à elle seule, mérité un tel traitement de faveur; c'est un mouvement plus vaste qui a dû être visé ... Le Coran aurait-il englobé sous l'appellation de Sabéens les Baptistes de Syrie ? Nous n'oserions ni l'affirmer ni le nier" (p.208 f.).

261) GUNDUZ, *The Knowledge of Life*, p.25 f.

262) We believe that the number of witnesses in agreement about a certain feature could not be judged by itself an undisputable factor for deciding the very weight which it deserves: it needs to take into adequate consideration not only the historical and cultural context of the source in question, but also the role which sometimes the chance may have played for the survival of a certain document: all this may appear ever so trivial, but it seems us closely paralleled by the important methodological discussion about the wrong use of the material in their possession often made by epigraphists, carried on by MITCHELL, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos", pp.97 ff. and 111 ff. In any case, it should be noted that nobody – as far as we know – has ever dwelt upon such a definition of Sabianism, despite its exceptional, very astonishing nature. Actually, literally speaking, which could be the meaning of a similar information ? How could one answer to the question ?

262 bis) About this point see the convincing argument of R. DUSSAUD, *Histoire et religion des Nosairis*, Paris 1900, p.84.

263) God-Fearers' acquaintance with the *Bible*, or at least with some portions of the *Old Testament* writings, is generally acknowledged: cf. for example again MITCHELL, op. cit., p.122: "The god-fearers were fully at home with monotheistic beliefs, familiar with religious ideas of the Jews and with Old Testament prophecy, but not wedded to them by uncompromising religious fundamentalism".

264) First printed edition by T. BUCHMANN (BIBLIANDER), Basilea 1543. About this famous translation, see the study of Marie Thérèse D'ALVERNY, "Deux Traductions Latines du Coran au Moyen Age", *AHDLMA* 16 (1948), pp.69-131. For the other Medieval translation made by MARC OF TOLEDE, dated 1211, but never printed, see below n.248.

265) BIBLIANDER, p.10.

266) BIBLIANDER, p.41 f.

267) BIBLIANDER, p.107. Also in MARC OF TOLEDE's translation (we have used the Ms. Turin B.N. f. V. 35 [XV c.]) the Sabians completely disappear as an autonomous religious group both in *Sura* II and XXII (f. 2 r. a, l. 8; f. 44 v. a ll. 11-2): in the first case, the term employed for rendering into Latin the Arabic *Nasàra* is *Christiani* (*Chani*), whereas in the second one the simple transcription *Nazarei* is adopted. In the *Sura* V (f. 15 v. b, l. 7) the Latin term selected is *Sabbahonitae* (our Ms.'s copyist, or somebody else, by a gloss over the word suggests: *Samaritani*, evidently having in mind AL-BIRUNI's passage from *Chronology*, p.314, or, even more probably, the other one from EIPHANIUS' *Panarion*, PG 41, 234-5; cf. BRANDT, *Die Judischen Baptismen*, p.113), whereas *Nasara* is once again simply transcribed: *Nazareni* (*ibidem*, l. 8: a gloss over the word suggests: *Christiani* [*Chani*]).

268) Two letters by Peter the Venerable to St. Bernard of the year 1143 stress the competence of the translators: "Je l'ai fait traduire par maître Pierre de Tolède, qui connaît bien le deux langues"; "Les traducteurs sont deux hommes connaissant bien les deux langues" (PETER THE VENERABLE, *Ep. Lib. IV, XVII, PL CVXXXIX*, p.339 and p.539, quoted by D'ALVERNY, *op. cit.*, p.72 and p.73).

269) MARC OF TOLÈDE translates the text quite literally, observing at the same time the original order of the *Suras* and their progressive numeration, whereas Robert of Ketton and Hermann of Carinthia group together some of the first chapters, but this fact does not allow us to evaluate the former version absolutely better than the latter (cf. D'ALVERNY, *op. cit.*, *passim*).

270) Andrea ARRIVABENE, Venezia 1547.

271) AL-TABARI, *Tafsir*, I, p.218; cf. above p.8 and n.54; but see also IBN AL-JAWZI, *Talbìs Iblìs*, ET by D.S. MARGOLIOUTH, *Islamic Culture* 9 (1935), p.380.

272) "During the patristic period – FELDMAN wrote - the Psalms became the Christian prayer book *par excellence*" ("Proselytes and 'Sympathizers'", p.293). The relationship *Psalms* – Christians is a commonplace, and it is useless therefore to insist upon it here. On the contrary, it seems us worth while remembering that the use of Hebrew *Elyon* (= *Hypsistos*) alone (namely not coupled with *El*) as a proper name for God becomes very frequent just in the *Psalms*, till the alternance *El Elyon* - *Elyon* (or their Greek equivalents) will gain a precise meaning in the last Biblical writings (as for example in the *Book of Daniel*) and, more in general, in all Jewish-Hellenistic literature including *Acts*: here, as FOAKES-JACKSON, *BC*, IV, p.193 note, rightly stressed, Luke employs in fact the latter or the former expression according to whether the presence of a "Jewish background" can be checked or cannot: cf. SIMON, "Theos Hypsistos", p.372 f. About *Elyon* see also below n.335 (end).

273) See C.P. JONES, *Phoenix* 36 (1982), pp.264-71; HORSLEY, *New Docs.*, V (1989), p.72 f.; M. RICL, "Hosios kai Dikaios", *Epigraphica Anatolica* 19 (1992), pp.99-101 (with special reference to *Hosios kai Dikaios*, the Phrigan god of justice, who must be regarded as an angel); G. PETZL, "Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens", *Epigraphica Anatolica* 22 (1994), p.5; MITCHELL, "Theos Hypsistos", p.103 ff., who records beside *Theòs* (*Zeus*) *Hypsistos* the presence of a lesser divinity variously designated as (*to*) *theion*, *theion basilikon*, or *theios angelos*: the role of heavenly messenger of the supreme divinity (see the adjective *epouranios* on an inscription from Galatia quoted *ibidem* no. 202, whereas angels and other gods are simply *ouranios*) may also be accomplished by the traditional pagan gods like Apollo, as the above cited (p.23 and n.201) Oenoanda Oracle demonstrates. Many classical references to the subject are collected by M.P. NILSSON, "The High God and the Mediator", *HTR* 56 (1963), pp.101-120; see also Idem, "Zwei Altare aus Pergamon", in *Opuscula Selecta* III, Lund 1960, p.297 ff.; F. SOKOLOWSKI, "Sur le Culte d'Angelos dans le Paganisme Grec et Romain", *HTR* 53 (1960), pp.225-9.

274) See A.R.R. SHEPPARD, "Pagan Cults of Angels in Roman Asia Minor", *Talanta* 12/13 (1980-81), p.77-101, for the relative geographical area; and the older studies of F. CUMONT and M. SIMON respectively published in *RHR* 36 (1915), pp.159-82 and in *CRAI* 1971, pp.120-32. For the important role played by the Jewish names of God and angels, see E.R. GOODENOUGH, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, II, New York 1953, p.153 ff.; SIMON, *Verus Israel*, p.394.

275) *Col.*, II, 16. THEODORET, *PG* 82, p.614 and p.619; cf. ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum*, 5, 4-5, condemning such a cultural practice. Angel worship is a clear symptom of Monotheistic belief: see again MITCHELL, *loc. cit.* p.103 f.

276) No doubt about this point: a comma between the two expressions is lacking also in Ms. versions, where moreover sometimes a gloss suggests: “*Cristianos leges variantes appellat*” (Ms. Vat. Lat. 4071, dated 1462, f.82v ll.8-11); *Christianos legum variatores appellat volens dicere illos evangelium corrupisse et ad suum libitum commutasse* (Ms. Turin B.N. H ii 33, XVI c. f.112v ll. 2-5); cf. ARRIVABENE’s Italian version: “... il Dio sarà giudice dei Giudei, e de Christiani che variano la loro legge, e d’ogni altra setta” (f. 65v). We have to do with a quite curious situation, indeed, for which the following explanation may be advanced: European translators wished to divide sharply Christianity from Islam, so that the former could keep itself pure by any contamination with the latter, and a good means for pursuing such a result surely was to let only a definition valid for heretics (and certainly not for orthodox Christians) appear as included into Muhammad’s horizon of mind. In any case, even the presence of comma should not be a sufficient means for distinguishing one group from another, because all the other religious communities mentioned here (Muslims, Jews, Magians and Unbelievers) are introduced by a conjunction such as *et (item et)* or *ac*.

277) See, for a general discussion, SIMON, *Verus Israel, passim*.

278) Cf. above p.25 and ns. 214-216.

279) *PIASH 2* (1968), p.152. The same point of view is shared in the clear and self-critical “Comunication” on Pines’ article by J. De MENASCE, “Les ‘Craignants Dieu’ et l’Appellation Iranienne des Chrétiens”, *HTR 171.2* (1967) (Section: Cronique), p.257 f: “Bref, à une certaine époque, il est très possible que, pour des populations parlant araméen, ‘craignant Dieu’ ait aussi désigné des Chrétiens. On objectera que nulle part dans la littérature syriaque, entièrement chrétienne, l’expression n’est employée pour désigner les Chrétiens: à quoi M. Pines répond avec pertinence que l’appellation a pu toutefois être courante parmi les non-Chrétiens pour désigner ceux qui l’étaient. Dès lors, il est légitime conclure que cette désignation, courante dans le monde araméophone des limes iranien, ait passé dans la langue iranienne au moment où elle ne désignait plus que les Chrétiens et soit devenue leur appellation normale. Evidemment à l’époque de l’inscription de Kartir [about which see below and n.281] le nom *tarsakàn* n’était encore généralisé et officialisé” (p.258). Previously, in fact, in the study *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, Fribourg 1945, the author seemed convinced (with other scholars as for example Noldeke) that the Iranian word was simply a translation of the Arabic *rahib* (originary “monk”, and then used for denoting generally Christians, cf. above ns.189, 248 and 260), but then he changed his mind arriving to the conclusion that the Arabic sense depended from the Iranian one and not the reverse.

280) The historical and semantic continuity between God-Ferarers and Christians is stressed by LEVINSKAYA, *The Book of Acts in Its 1 c. Setting*, p.116: “... at least some of these groups [Hypsistarii, *Caelicolae*, *Theosebeis*, Massalians] were at one stage or another connected with Christianity. The *Coelicolae* were condemned as Christian apostates and obliged by law to rejoin the Church. The Massalians were the forerunners of the Christian sect with the same name. The father of Gregory of Nazianzus, a member of Hypsistarii, was readily converted by bishops on their way to the Council of Nicaea in 325 ... Finally, if we compare the spread of Christianity among the population of the Bosporan Kingdom with that of the nearby Chersonese, a striking dissimilarity comes to light, which can be explained by the presence of numerous God-fearers who prepared the way for Christianity in the former”.

281) *La Christianisation de l’Empire Iranien*, *CSCO 499*, Subs. 80, Louvain 1988, p.117; cf. G. WIESSNER, I, *Untersuchungen zur syrischen Literaturgeschichte*, p.66 and p.317 ns.249, 251, 252 and 254, where one will find out all the references about the two terms as synonymous in the *Acta*; II, *Zur Martyreruberlieferung aus der Christenverfolgung Schapurs II*, *AAWG*, Phil.-Hist. Kl. III.67, Gottingen 1967, p.70 f. and notes (“in the ‘B’ Life of Simeon bar Sabba’e the term *nasraya* is only found in the mouth of Persians”); PAYNE-SMITH, *Thesaurus*, col.1821, s.v. “Kristiàna”, and col.2444, s.v. “Nasràya”; J.B. FIEY, *Jalons pour une Histoire de l’Eglise en Iraq*, *CSCO 330*, Subs. 36, Louvain 1970, p.54 n.44 (on Kartir’s Inscription and the two names for Christians). Text and discussion of the document by Marie Louise CHAUMONT, “L’Inscription de Kartir à la Ka’bah de Zoroastre”, *JA 248* (1960), pp.339-80 (the words in question are at l.10 of the Persian text). For the alleged Judaeo-Christian background of the term *nàcaràv* (and its connection with the Aramaean term *nàsràv* = from Nazareth) see H.H. SCHAEDEER, art. “Nazarenòs, Nazoraìos”, *TWNT IV* [1941], p.879 f.; M. RONCAGLIA, “Eléments Ebionites et Elkésaites dans le Coran”, *POC 21* (1971), pp.101-26. For the alleged identity with a heretical group such as the Marcionites see J. De MENASCE, *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, p.206 f. (but see also the objections of J.M. FIEY, “Les Marcionites dans les Textes Historiques de l’Eglise de Perse”, *Le Museon 83* [1970], pp.183-8); cf. A. VOOBUS, “Celibacy, a Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church”, *ETSE 1* (1951),

p.14 f. (who remarks that in the *Acts of Mar Abà* [VI c.] [*Jabalaha*, 2nd ed., p.213] the Marcionites are called Christians); for the equation Nazaraeans – Mandaean (who really call themselves in such a way, see M. LIDZBARSKI, “Nazaraei”, *ZS* 1 [1922], pp.230-3), cf. M. SPRENGLING, *Third Century Iran*, Chicago 1953, p.58. Finally, S. BROCK, “Some Aspects of Greek Words in Syriac”, in A. DIETRICH ed., *Syncretismus im Syrisch-Persischen Kulturgebiet*, Symposium of Göttingen 4th-8th October 1971, Göttingen 1974, pp.91-5 (with further bibliography), remarks that *nàcarày* and *kristiàn* denote “two groups of different geographical origin and of different cultural allegiance” (p.92), *nàcarày* being the normal term used at that time by the Persian authorities (and more in general by outsiders) for denoting Christians, whereas *kristiàn* was a term introduced into the Persian area only in the mid III century for denoting the Christians of Western origin, namely those who had been settled in the Sassanid empire in consequence of Shapur I’s deportations: as far as the name used by Christians for denoting themselves is concerned, the author tentatively suggests the Semitic term *msihaya*, because “with the growing influence of Antiochene Christianity in the Sassanid empire in the late fourth, and especially early fifth, century, the term *kristyana* came to be used for all Christians, irrespective of their origin, thus displacing *msihaya*. At the same time, *nàsrayà* evidently gained, in Christian eyes, distinctly pejorative overtones that had originally not been present in the word” (p.94 f.). Cf. FIEY, *Communautés Syriennes en Iran et Iraq*, p.181 f., who records in Iran, namely at Rew Ardashir, “au moins deux églises, l’une des ‘Romains’ et l’autre des ‘Karmàniens’. Les premiers sont probablement de ces prisonniers que Sapor I^{er} (241-2) distribua dans toutes les villes de son empire et grâce auxquels il restaura Rew Ardashir. Les seconds sont de vrais persans christianisés; ceux-ci, déportés de l’intérieur [n.33: “je ne sais pas sur quoi se base M.lle Chaumont pour attribuer cette église aux ‘Syriens’ (p.178), ce qu’elle interprète (p.179) par de gens ‘originaires des campagnes de l’Antiochène ... parlant syriaque”], célébraient leurs offices en syriaque, alors que les premiers priaient en grec”. It is not at all improbable that Muhammad used *Nasàra* and *Sàbi’ùn* as synonyms, even if the words had a different origin and possibly did not have a strictly identical meaning: our opinion is that the latter word – though referring like the former generally to Christians without any further implication – kept a close semantical link with the idea of Christians as *tertium genus hominum* (cf. above pp.18-22 and n.277) which played an important role also for the Muslim prophetology. [“In the Province of Arabia the baptized ... were called ‘initiated’ (*oi memnemènoi*) or ‘enlightened’ (*oi pephotismènoi*), while the catechumens ranked as the uninitiated”, SPENCER-TRIMMINGHAM, op. cit., p.217; cf. p.103. For the problem of the catechuminate, see in particular above n.198].

282) AL-BUKHARI, *Al-jàmi’ al-sahih*, ed. L. KREHL - T.W. JUYNBOLL (1862-1908), II, lviii (*al-jiziyya*), chap. 11, p.296; FT by O.HOUDAS - W.MARCAIS (1903-1914), Titre lviii (*La Capitation*), chap.11 “Du cas où les ennemis vaincus disent: ‘Nous nous faisons Sabiens’, et n’ont su dire correctement: ‘Nous nous faisons Musulmans’ “), p.414.

283) The same episode is narrated again by AL-BUKHARI, op. cit., III, lxiv (*al-maghàzi*), chap.58; FT Titre lxiv (*Des Expéditions Militaires*), chap.58 (“De l’envoi fait par le Prophète de Khàlid-ben-el-Oualid chez les Benou-Djodzima”), p.200; and IV, xciii, chapt. 35 (*ahkàm*); FT Titre xciii (*Sentences*), chap. 35 (*Lorsque le magistrat rend une sentence inique ou en contradiction avec l’opinion des juriconsultes, ce jugement doit être repoussé*), p.515; the author, however, does not repeat in these last chapters the information referring to the Persian expression previously given in Book lviii, chapt.11.

284) In KREHL’s edition the Persian word is vocalized *mataras*; *matras* is the vocalization of the FT where, at the relative note (n.2), the translation: “Ne crains pas !” can also be found.

285) See, for example, the puzzling story handed down in the so called *al-qasidah al-himyariyah* (by an anonymous author, cit. in C. ANSALDI, *Il Yemen*, Roma 1933, pp.57-59), narrating the legendary history of Yemenite kings, about the fabulous meeting between the parents of the Queen of Sheba (Balkis): the father, in fact, al-Hadhàd bin Sarh (the first King of Yemen), fell in love with her mother (the Queen of *Jins* and she herself a *jinniyah*) in the course of a hunt, after having followed a wolf (ar.: *dhi’b*) running after a gazelle (ar.: *zhab’i*). The relation Sabians – Sabaeans has apparently to be rejected – as it is well known – for the plain etymological reason that these nouns derive from two different roots (as just the initial difference *sad* – *sin* is sufficient to prove), and in fact just one scholar suggested an explanatory key for the phenomenon of Sabianism in the Monotheistic communities settled in Southern Arabia since centuries in Muhammad’s times (BELL, *The Origin of Islam*, p.60 and 148: the author was “personally inclined” to think that *Nasàra* in the *Qur’àn* denoted the Christians of the Northern Arabia, and to take *Sàbi’ùn* as a reference to South Arabian Christians). Nevertheless, similar suggestions – together with the common feature of gravitating around a theme as important as Conversion shared by the Sabians (according to our theory about them, of course) and by the Sabaeans (the Biblical episode of Queen of Sheba’s Conversion does not need to be remembered) – let

one understand how difficult is to find a solid ground in such matters. Let us reproduce the words of R. GUENON, *Le Roi du Monde*, Paris 1958, p.21: "... dans le course du Moyen Age ... celle qui se pourrait designer 'la couverture extérieure' du [cosmic] Centre en question était constituée en bonne partie par les Nestoriens et les Sabéens".

285 bis) See the already quoted lemma *jàre' jiràh moràh*, *TWAT* s.v., cols.869-93, in particular the v paragraph ("Furchte dich nicht !").

286) HJARPE, *Les Sabéens Harràniens*, *passim*.

287) IBN AL-NADIM, *Fihrist*, ET p.753 f. Different versions of the same story are transmitted by PSEUDO-MAJRITI, *Ghàyat al-hakim* (ref. below n.296) p.60 f., p.139 f. and p.228; GT (ref. below n.296), p.62 f., p.146 f. and p.240 f.; LT (*Picatrix*) (ref. below n.297), p.34, and p.137. Cf. HJARPE, *op. cit.*, pp.105-126, who reproduces a comparative pattern of the Talking Head legend, recording also the long *Chronicle* of DIONYSIUS (Bishop of Tell Mahre in the VIII c.) published by J.-B. CHABOT, *Chronicon pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, CSCO 91, Paris 1928.

288) As GREEN, *The City of the Moon-God*, p.120, opportunely notes, Abù Yusuf Isha' al-Qatiy'i's "animosity toward ... the pagans of Harran ... is quite evident".

289) Some texts suggest that early on the Muslim government could not ignore the real nature of the Harranian religion and, consequently, they also prove Abù Yusuf al-Qatiy'i's unworthiness. The Muslim conqueror of the city, 'Iyad ibn Ghanam, transformed for example one of the Harrànians' temples into the "Friday Mosque", "but allotted them another locality in Harran where they built another temple which remained in their hands until its destruction by Yahya Ibn Shatir who was governor of Harran on behalf of Sharaf al-Dawlah [1081 C.E.]": the information is contained in the pages of the *A'làq* of IBN SHADDAD (who visited the city in 1242 C.E., just before the Mongolian conquest and the consequent deportation of the inhabitants which marked the final as well as inglorious end of its millenary history) translated by C. CAHEN, "La 'Djazira' au milieu du treizième siècle", *REI*, VIII (1934), p.109 ff., and partially reproduced by RICE, "Medieval Harran", p.38; cf. AL-BALADHURI, *Futùh al-buldàn*, ed. Beirut 1398 H./1978, p.178 f., ET by P.K. HITTY, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, New York 1916 (other references about the inclusion, since the very beginnings of the Muslim rule, of the Harrànians among *ahl al-dhimma*, i.e. the "subject people", in GUNDUZ, *The Knowledge of Life*, p.36 n.150). On the other hand, BAR HEBRAEUS tells in his *Chronicon* (ET cit. above n.159), p.139, that just few years before al-Ma'mùn's halt in Harràn, Caliph's uncle Ibrahim who was at that time governor of the city "permitted the pagans of Harran to perform their mysteries openly, and at length they arrived at such a pitch of boldness that they decked out an ox in costly apparel, and gave him a crown of flowers, and they hung little bells on his horns, and they walked him around the bazaars whilst men sang songs and (played) pipes; and in this manner they offered him up as a sacrifice to their gods". There is no reason, however, to judge these elements by themselves as a clear sign of Paganism following the opinion of CHWOLSON, *op. cit.*, I, p.468 ff., of HJARPE, *op. cit.*, p.100, of GREEN, *op. cit.*, p.121, etc.: it does not need but to think for example to some Italian coloured processions in honour of Mary or of the local Saints, which to a Protestant eye till recent times could not represent anything else than pagan survivals. A third document in contrast with *al-Fihrist*'s version of the facts is the famous "Edict of Toleration" obtained by the Sabian poet and scholar Ibrahim ibn Hilàl (living in Baghdad and dying there in 994 C.E.) by the amir 'Adud al-Dawlah on behalf of his coreligionists "in Harràn, Raqqah and Diyar-Mudhar", allowing the Sabians to practice their religious precepts in the traditional way: from the *Rasà'il* of ABÛ-IS'HÀQ IBRAHÌM IBN HILÀL HARRÀNI, quoted by CHWOLSON, *op. cit.*, II, p.537, cf. I, p.660. In addition to Hjarpe and Green's studies, further contributes to discussion about the real relations Muslims - Harrànian Sabians come from SEGAL, "The Sabian Mysteries", *passim*, and by TARDIEU, "Sàbiens Coraniques et 'Sàbiens' de Harràn", p.5 ff.

290) See above p.2 and n.17.

291) Though the circumstance is systematically reckoned by the authors dealing with the history of the city, none of the available studies deepens particularly this period. The famous episode witnessing the scientific importance of the city much before the historical phase of the "Sabian Renaissance", namely the School of Medicine's transfert from Alexandria to Harràn by the Caliph 'Umar II in 717 C.E., is discussed in detail by TARDIEU, *op. cit.*, p.291 ff., who rejects the traditional reconstruction of the event.

- 292) The bibliographical references to Thàbit ibn Qurrà are listed above n.176; for the other Sabian personalities of Harrànian origin see CHWOLSON, op. cit., I, p.542 ff; De LACY O' LEARY, *Arabic Thought and its Place in the History*, pp.43, 54 f. and 105 ff.; and more in general the bibliography given by F.C. De BLOIS, art. "Sàbi", *EF* VIII, pp.692-4.
- 293) DOZY-De GOEJE, "Nouveaux Documents pour l'étude de la Religion des Harràniens", p. 292, quoting a letter of Noldeke. The original material reproduced by these scholars - especially the astral prayers originating from a Harrànian milieu and contained within the *Ghàyat al-hakim* (see below and n.296) - was not available by Chwolson.
- 294) As it is well known, TARDIEU, op. cit., *passim*, is the first scholar who particularly insisted on the pure Neoplatonic origin of the Harrànian theology: see above n.178 and below n.318.
- 295) About the Harrànian system, the most relevant Islamic sources are AL-NADIM, *Fihrist*, ET pp.746-50 (the original source is al-Kindi, cf. F. ROSENTHAL, *Ahmad bin at-Tayyib as-Saràhsi*, New Haven 1943, pp.41-51); IKHWAN AL-SAFÀ', *Rasà'il*, ed. Beirut 1957, IV, p.295 ff., FT of the relative section by MARQUET, "Sabéens et Ikhwàn al-Safà'", *SI* 24 (1966), especially p.62 ff.; AL-MAQDISI, *Le Livre de la Création et de l'Histoire*, I, pp.132, 159, 173, 185 (= SCOTT, *Hermetica* IV, p.252 f.); AL-SHAHRASTANI, *Milal*, GT p.1 ff. Among the Western studies dedicated to the subject, one cannot but signalize the excellent essay of CORBIN, "Rituel Sabéen et Exegèse Ismaélienne du Rituel" (ref. above n.134), *passim*.
- 296) PSEUDO- MAJRITI, *Das Ziel des Weisens*, ed. H. RITTER, Leipzig-Berlin 1933; GT by H. RITTER - M. PLESSNER, "*Picatrix*". *Das Ziel des Weisens von Pseudo-Majriti*, London 1962.
- 297) *Picatrix. The Latin Version of the Ghàyat Al-Hakim*, ed. D. PINGREE, London 1986. Both works, the Latin and the Arabic one followed by a GT have been edited by the Warburg Institute. It is convenient to keep in mind that the *Picatrix* is a quite free translation of the original Arabic text.
- 298) *Ghàya*, III, 7. The original version tells in fact: *idha àradat àn tanàja kawkaban aw tas'alùhu hàjatun fa'istash'ar awalan taqwa Allàh ta'àla* (p.195); whereas the German one tells: "Wenn du zu einem Planeten beten oder ihn um etwas bitten willst, *so fasse vor allem Gottvertrauen*" (p.206). The LT omits the reference to the Fear of God: *Cum volueris cum aliquo planetarum loqui vel ab eo aliquid tibi necessarium petere, primo et principaliter voluntatem et credenciam tuam erga Deum mundifica, et omino caveas ne in aliquo alio credas*".
- 299) In his study "Al-Tabarì on the Prayers to the Planets", *BEO* 46 (1992), pp.105-117, which is an important integration of his previous "Some of the Sources of the *Ghàyat Al-Hakim*", *JWCI* 43 (1980), pp.1-15, D. PINGREE recognizes several sources of the Book III chapter 7 consecrated to the prayers to the seven planets (plus *Ursa Maior*), each one being characterized by a ritual of its own, including generally a dress of a certain colour, a ring and an incense vessel of a certain metal or stone, an incense, an animal to sacrifice (of course, colours, materials, fumigations and animals being those traditionally put in correspondence to the planetary Beings), and finally a prayer: there exists therefore more than one prayer for each planet (even four, for example, for Juppiter), except for Mercury and Moon, which the author links to different sources and which, consequently, can be ordered in a certain number (three or four) of different series. The source called by Pingree "Sabian" – and the relative series including the 1st prayer to Saturn, the 2nd to Juppiter, the 2nd to Mars, the 1st to Venus, the 1st to the Sun, the only available ones to Mercury and Moon - is specially interesting for us, because every prayer contains the particular formula which we quote just below in our text referring explicitly to the Most-High God.
- 300) This expression recurs for Saturn, Juppiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury: *Ghàya*, III, 7, GT p.215 (Saturn: "Beim Herrn des höchsten Gebäudes"), cf. AV p.204 (l.9: *bi-l-haqq al-baniyyat al-'uliya*); GT p.217 (Juppiter: "Bei dem < Herrn des > höchsten Gebäude<s>"), cf. AV p.206; GT p.224 (Mars: "Bei dem Herrn des höchsten Gebäudes"), cf. AV p.212; p.227; GT p.231 (Venus: "Bei dem Herrn des Höchsten Gebäudes"), cf. AV p.219; GT p.234 (Mercury: "Beim Herrn des höchsten Gebäudes"), cf. AV p.222. For the Moon there is a clear reference to God and His Majesty: see GT p.236 ("Ich bitte dich ... moigest du ... gehorchen mit dem Gehorsam zu Gott und seiner Herrschaft", ll.14-7), cf. AV p.224, l.8. For the Sun, we have to do indeed with a contradiction, because by one side its Power appears subordinate to a higher Rule: see GT p.228 ("... du von Ewigkeit her heilig und mit unendlicher Herrschaft geheiligt bist", ll.3-4), cf. AT p.216, ll.10-11; but, on the other side, it is called "Primary Cause of the Primary Causes" (GT p.228,

“Ursache des Ursachen”, cf. AT p.216), and “the highest of the Degrees” (GT p.228, “... du die höchste der Rangstufen einnimmst”, cf. AT p.216, l.16). It is also noteworthy the invocation used for Ursa Maior in addition to the words “For the Lord of the High Building” employed for the other planets, namely “For the God of the gods” (GT p.227, “Bei dem Gott der Gotter, dem Herrn des höchsten Gebäudes”; cf. AV p.215): this expression, in fact, makes part of the *repertoire* of liturgic formulas traditionally recited in honour of the Moon-God *Sin* in Harràn and in the neighbouring region since the Babylonian period till to the Muslim Middle Ages (see below p.34 and n.303).

301) For Sumatar’s inscriptions see H. POGNON, who firstly visited the place (in 1901 and 1905), *Inscriptions Sémitiques de la Syrie, de la Mésopotamie et de la région de Mossoul*, Paris 1907, p.81, but above all J.B. SEGAL, who published the whole series engraved on the Central Mount, dominating the site and functioning as a cult place, fifty years later in his studies “Pagan Syriac Monuments in the Vilayet of Urfa”, *AS* 3 (1953), pp.97-120, and “Some Syriac Inscriptions of the 2nd-3rd Century”, *BSOAS* 16 (1954), pp.13-25; and H.J.W. DRIJVERS, *Old-Syriac (Edesseean) Inscriptions*, Leiden 1972; Idem, “Some New Syriac Inscriptions and Archaeological Finds from Edessa and Sumatar Harabesi”, *BSOAS* 36 (1973), pp.1-14; Idem, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, Leiden 1980, p.123 ff., who published some additional inscriptions. The title *Marelahè*, in particular, recurs three times (cf. for ex. *Old-Syr. Ins.*, pp.13-4 and 16-8 [nos.18, 23, 24]; *Cults and Beliefs*, pp.124, 125, 126).

302) SEGAL, op. cit. (1953), p.97, and op. cit. (1954), p.15. For DRIJVERS’ criticism to the opinion advanced not without some hesitations by SEGAL (in his later work “The Sabian Mysteries”, p.217, in fact, the author had also suggested that *Màrilàhà* [*Màralàhè*] of Sumatar might perhaps be identified with *Shamàl*, the god of the “North”, of Harràn), see *Cults and Beliefs*, p.127 f., where it is rightly observed that such a reading is not in accordance with the Harrànian background of *Sin*’s cult nor with the linguistic evidence (bibliographical references for other divinities bearing the title *Marelahé* *ibidem*, p.124 n.10). Cf. also M. GAWLIKOWSKI, “Nouvelles Inscriptions du Camp de Dioclétien”, *Syria* 47 (1970), p.317: “Bien que Segal ait voulu identifier cette divinité avec Baalshamèn, il n’est plus douteux que Marilahè de Harràn et de Hatra n’ait été le dieu lunaire Sin”.

303) This important discovery was made during the Turkish-British archaeological campaign already mentioned (above n.15) under the Friday Mosque’s floor (the stele upon which the inscription was engraved had been used as a staircase) by C.J. GADD, “The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus”, *AS* 8 (1958), pp.35-92: *Sin* is honoured with the titles “Lord of the gods”, *bèlu shar ilàni*, and “King of the gods”, *shar ilàni*, pp.47, 49, 57, 59. Cf. the title *bèl Harràn* recorded by AL-BIRUNI, *Chronology*, p.316.

304) AL-NADIM, *Fihrist*, p.325, cf. ET p.765 n.98. According to other Medieval Islamic sources the god was also called with the title *‘ilàh al-‘àliyah*, “God of the gods”, which we have already found in the *Ghàya* (cf. above n.300): AL-SHAHRASTANI, *Milal*, p.203, GT p.5; AL-DIMASHQI, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, p.47, with FT.

305) For the coins see J. WALKER, *Numismatic Chronicle* [RN] 18 (1958), pp.170-2, Pl. XIV, nos.11 and 12. For the inscription (the famous Inscription of Sa’adiya), see A. CAQUOT, “Nouvelles Inscriptions Araméennes de Hatra”, *Syria* 40 (1963), pp.12-4; J. TEIXIDOR, “Notes Hatréennes”, *Syria* 41 (1964), pp.273-9; B. AGGOULA, “Remarques sur les Inscriptions Hatréennes”, *MUSJ* 47 (1972), pp.45-9; F. VATTIONI, *Le Iscrizioni di Hatra*, Suppl. 28 to *Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, Vol.41 (1981), fasc.3, Napoli 1981, pp.13 and 106. It should be stressed, anyway, that “le ‘Marilahé’ de cette inscription [as the god recorded on the coins, of course] est un dieu étranger à la région” (Aggoula, p.47), and that his presence in Hatra is therefore quite problematic. A reproduction of one coin can be found in SEGAL’s “The Sabian Mysteries”, p.217. On the whole question see also TUBACH, *Im Schatten des Sonnengottes*, p.291 ff.

306) As GAWLIKOWSKI, “Nouvelles Inscriptions du Camp de Dioclétien”, p.317, correctly pointed out: “À Palmyre, comme on le sait, il n’est point question d’un dieu lunaire à la tête du panthéon”. About the cult of the supreme god in Palmyra, see J. TEIXIDOR, *The Pantheon of Palmyra*, Leiden 1979, pp.1-25; about the anonymous god, *ibidem*, pp.115-9; or also R. Du MESNIL Du BOISSON, “Le Dieu Soi-Disant Anonyme à Palmyre”, in M.B. De BOER - T.A. EDRIDGE eds., *Hommages à M.J. Vermaseren*, EPRO 68, Leiden 1978, pp.777-81.

307) GAWLIKOWSKI, loc. cit.

308) GAWLIKOWSKI, op. cit. p.319 no.4. The correspondence *Marilahé* (Diocletian's Campus, Inscription no.2) – I.O.M. – Zeus Hypsistos (Inscription no.4) is explicitly acknowledged by the author, *ibidem*, p.317: "Il s'agit évidemment d'un dieu suprême [*Marilahé*] en qui l'appellation periphrastique invite à reconnaître le dieu anonyme, forme évoluée et spiritualisée de Baalshamèn, connue par une multitude de textes ... Nos nos. 3 et 4 viennent s'ajouter à cette liste".

309) See E. BIKERMAN, "Anonymous Gods", *JWCI* 1 (1937-8), pp.187-96, to which, for the Semitic area, at least the article "Baal", *RAC* I, p.1065 ff., should be added. For the "Unknown God", to whom St. Paul makes reference on the Areopagus during his speech to the Athenians, see P.W. Van Der HORST, "The Altar of the 'Unknown God' in Athens (Acts 17, 23) and the Cult of 'Unknown Gods' in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods", *ANRW* II, 18, pp.1426-56 (but see also his essay "The Unknown God" in *Knowledge of God*, ref. below n.320, pp.19-42) including a selected bibliography on the subject since the classical *Agnostos Theos*, Leipzig 1913 (repr. Darmstadt 1956) of E. NORDEN: among the texts quoted, the art. "Agnoèò, àgnostos, etc", *TWNT* I (1933), pp..120-2, by R. BULTMANN, deserves special attention.

310) See the art. "Baal Shamin", *RAC* I, p. 1078 f., according to which this god, previously identified by the *interpretatio graeca* to Zeus (Hypsistos), "vielleicht hat im ersten Drittel des 2. Jh. nC. unter dem Einfluss der auf eine Lauterung der Gottesvorstellung dringenden monotheistischen Bewegung B.-Sch. durch den namenlosen Gott ersetzt bzw. seinen Namen aufgegeben" (p.1079). But also what SIMON, "Syncretisme nord-africain" (cit. above n.72), p.512 n.26, objected about: "Il me semble plutôt qu'il a été assimilé, selon les lieux, à telle ou telle figure divine, toujours chef du panthéon local ... La tendance monothéiste du paganisme tardif ne suppose pas nécessairement l'anonymat du dieu virtuellement unique". That is the historical-religious context by which we should read the statement of BIKERMAN, op. cit., p.192, according to whom "the Babylonian Moon-God, Sin, for example, who was taken over by the town of Carrhae as the god Sin of the town of Carrhae, became anonymous among the Syrians, who called him the Baal of Carrhae": as we have more than once already seen, the proper name of the Harràn's Moon-God was never replaced by this alternative expression, which can be explained in terms of an episodic need to stress the highest rank of the divinity.

311) See the classical A. BOUCHE-LECLERCQ, *L'Astrologie Grecque*, Paris 1899, or F. BOLL, *Sphaera*, Leipzig 1903, where the so-called *sphaera barbarica* and *sphaera graecanica* are clearly described.

312) TARDIEU, "Sàbiens Coraniques et 'Sàbiens' de Harràn", p.13.

313) For the identification of the Harrànians with the ancient philosophers (to be read together with the other one, already quoted above p.21 and n.176 ff., Harrànians – Greeks), in addition to AL-MAS'UDI, *Les Prairies d'Or*, p.64 (who connects their philosophical position to Eclecticism), see AL-SHAHRASTANI, *Milal*, GT p.1 ff.

314) AL-MAS'UDI, *Les Prairies d'Or*, p.65 (Arabic Text). Even if the Muslim poligraph adds to this information the famous Platonic idea of Man as a heavenly Tree (PLATO, *Timaeus*, 90 A 7-B2) in order to justify perhaps the truthfulness of his sources, the passage in question cannot be found in the writings of Plato (see also below n.318).

315) CHWOLSON, *Die Ssabier*, II, p.373.

316) *Ibidem*, p.826, following a suggestion of Prof. FLEISCHER ("Wer seines eignen Wesen [sich selbst] erkennt, wird göttlich, gottähnlich"). On the subject, see A. ALTMAN, "The Delphic Maxim in Medieval Islam and Judaism", in *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism*, London 1969, pp.1-40; H.D. BETZ, "The Delphic Maxim *Gnòthi sautòn* in Hermetic Interpretation", *HTR* 63 (1970), pp.465-84. We find quite interesting, even if it seems going against the general trend (cf. above n.152), the relationship Terah – Socrates proposed by PHILO, *Somn.*, I, 57 ff., in consequence of the same precept "Know yourself !" observed by both of them according to the Jewish writer.

317) AL-MAS'UDI, op. cit., p.65 (FT).

318) AL-MAS'UDI, *Les Prairies d'Or*, Revision de la traduction de B. de Meynard et P. de Courteille par Ch. PELLAT, II, Paris 1965, p.536; cf. TARDIEU, op. cit., p.14, who in relation to the alleged Platonic saying engraved on the door of the Harrànian shrine states that "c'est à l'évidence un rappel de *I Alcibiade* 133 C": but the passage in question is nothing more than a reference to the divine nature of the human soul,

so that “a rather broad reading of the Greek text” (GREEN, *The City of the Moon-God*, p.167) is required to share Tardieu’s opinion. A relevant example of the idea - particularly dear to late Neoplatonism as well as to Hermetism - of “becoming god”, is recorded by NOCK, *Conversion*, p.157 ff., who cites the case of the emperor Julian; other examples of the spiritual need “to become possessed of a nature like god” *ibidem*, p.103; see also FREDE, “Monotheism and Pagan Philosophy”, cit. above n.118, p.65 (“... salvation [for Platomists] consists in the vision of the first principle through which one becomes like God”), and *passim*.

319) Cit. (above n.134), p.183 and n.7. The great orientalist also points out to the equivalence of the Arabic verb *ta'allàha* with the “*theòsis* des mystiques bizantins” and with the Persian *khodà shodan* of Nàsir-i Khusraw (*ibid.* p.52 n.7).

320) SENECA, *Ep.* XCV, 47. For the “Knowledge of God”, cf. BULTMANN, art. “Agnoè”, *TWNT* I, p.122, and more in particular R. Van Den BROEK – T. BAARDA – J. MANSFELD eds., *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Poman World*, EPRO 112, Leiden-New York-Kobenhavn-Koln 1988.

321) In addition to the already cited studies (above n.148) see L. MASSIGNON, “Inventaire de la Litterature Hermétique Arabe”, in R.P. FESTUGIERE, *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, I, Appendice III, Paris 1950, pp.384-400; M. PLESSNER, “Hermes Trismegistus and Arab Science”, *SI* 2 (1954), pp.45-60; J. RUSKA, *Tabula Smaragdina. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Hermetischen Literature*, Heidelberg 1926. For a general survey, see M. ULLMANN, *Die Natur und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam*, Leiden 1972.

322) LACTANTIUS, *Div. Inst.* II, 15, 6 (= SCOTT, *Hermetica*, IV, p.15. Scott introduces the material about Harrànians in the I Vol., Oxford 1924, p.97 ff., and reproduces it in the IV, p.248 ff. among the “Testimonia”).

323) *C.H.* IX, 4, 17. Cf. NOCK, *Conversion*, p.119: “Piety will give you knowledge. This is the attitude of those who trusted cults rather than speculation. The harder thinkers held the opposite proposition, which we find in Hellenistic philosophy, that knowledge, and above all knowledge of God, is or produces piety”.

324) *Poimandres*, Leipzig 1904, p.166.

325) DANTE, *Paradise*, IV, 28. Cf. the convincing essay of Edy MINGUZZI, *L’Enigma Forte, il Codice Occulto della Divina Commedia*, Genova 1988 (where for the first time an exegetical key for the internal structure and many obscure passages of the *Commedia* is found in the Alchemical culture), p.48; see also the neologism “*trasumanar*” in *Paradise*, I, 70. For a possible as well as surprising confession of Dante who could have embraced during his youth the “Sabian” error, see the enigmatic verses “*Raphel mai ameche zabì almi*” (*Inferno*, XXXI, 67) which have frequently attracted scholarship’s attention: see for example D. GUERRI, “Il Nome di Dio nella Lingua di Adamo secondo il XXVI del Purgatorio e il Verso di Nembrotte del XXXI dell’Inferno”, *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 54 (1909), pp.65-76; R. LEMAY, “Le Nemrod de l’ Enfer’ de Dante et le ‘Liber Nembroth’”, *Studi Danteschi* 40 (1963), pp. 57-128. The subject would deserve however deeper investigation.

326) We should not forget that it was because the charge of pantheism that personalities like al-Hallàj or Suhrawardi undercame the martyrdom.

327) It is worth while remembering that the meaning “to become god” of the verb *ta'allàha* is not mentioned at all both in FREYTAG and in LANE’s *Lexicon*: the former in relation to *àlaha* (V form) gives the following definition: “coluit, adoravit, cultui se dedit”; likewise the latter: “he devoted himself to religious exercises; (he) applied himself to acts of devotion” (thus, such were probably the linguistic authorities taken into account by MARGOLIOUTH, art. “Harrànians”, p.520b, when translating Harràn’s maxim in the most natural way: “Whoso knows himself is religious”). Indeed, DOZY in his *Supplement* includes – as several contemporary Arabic Dictionaries do, for example KASIMIRSKI - the equivalence *ta'allàha* - “to become god”, but he quotes only two items (from al-MAQQARI and from SCHIAPPARELLI’s *Vocabulista*), a further proof of a quite rare use of the verb with this meaning.

328) E. POCOCK, *Specimen Historiae Arabum*, Oxford 1649, p.142 f.: *Saba, Exercitus ... quasi saba hash-shamayim, Exercitus coelitis cultores*; cf. CHWOLSON, op. cit., I, p.31, who also cites the scholars (Golius, Hyde, Wahl, Sommer) following this opinion.

329) As it is well known, the Hebrew philosopher considered the Sabians as Abraham's adversaries and described them as worshippers of the heavenly bodies, whom they viewed "as deities, and the sun as their chief deity. They believe that all the seven stars are gods, but the two luminaries are greater than all the rest ... All the Sabians thus believed in the eternity of the Universe, the heavens being, in their opinion, God" (MAIMONIDES, *Moreh Nebukim*, ET *The Guide of the Perplexed*, by M. FRIEDLANDER, London 1904, pp.315-7). Large excerpts from Maimonides' book are reproduced in German by CHWOLSON, op. cit., II, pp.251-91.

330) TARDIEU, op. cit., p.41 f., argues that Pocock was wrong in his understanding of the meaning of the word, but at the same time he was correct in the etymology itself: the French scholar advances therefore the conjecture that the *Sàbi'ùn* mentioned by Muhammad are a gnostic sect of Jewish origin, and precisely the *Stratitotikoi* recorded by EPIPHANIUS, *Pan.* 29, 7, 7 (*GCS* 25, p.330, 4-7 HOLL), 40, 1, 5 (*GCS* 31, p.81, 15-18) given the exact semantic correspondence of this name with the Jewish term which might be used for the "adepts of the celestial armies".

331) KOELER-BAUMGARTNER, *HALAT*, II, p.934, s.v. *sabà*.

332) See for example, for Imperial times, J. HELGELAND, "Roman Army Religion", or E. BIRLEY, "The Religion of the Roman Army: 1895-1977", *ANRW* II, 16, 2, pp.1470-1505 and 1506-41. The figure of the "Stranger", Salman, in Ismailian historiosophy, is a leit-motif in the works of CORBIN (see for example "Rituel Sabéen", n.144 ff. or more particularly the monography *Salman Pak*).

333) L. MASSIGNON, "Esquisse d'une Bibliographie Qarmate", in *A Volume ... to E.G. Browne* (cit. above n.32), p.333.

334) Cf. *Samuel*, 2, 22..

335) PSEUDO-MAJRITI, *Das Ziel des Weisens*, ed. RITTER p.80 (... *al-Sàbi'a, wa hum mamàlik al-nabt min al-kasdàniyyin*); GT by RITTER-PLESSNER, p.83. It is worth noting that the Harrànians are often called "Chaldaeans", even if generally this information is handed down by the same Muslim authors asserting the usurpation of the name "Sabians" by them since al-Ma'mùn's times: HAMZA AL-ISFAHANI, *Tàrikh sinì mulùk al-'ard wa al-'anbiyà*, LT GOTTWALDT, p.4 (*Chaldaeii occidentis tractum occupabant eorumque nepotes in urbis Carrarum atque Edessae hodieque reperiuntur*)[ed. JAWAD AL-IRANI AL-TABRIZI, Berlin 1340 H., p.7: "Today (10th centurt A.D.) their descendants live in the city of Harràn and Rùhà (modern Urfa). They gave up this name (Chaldaeans) from the time of the caliph al-Ma'mùn and adopted the name *sàbi'ùn*"]; AL-KHAWARIZMI, *Mafàtìh al-'ulùm*, ed. Van VLOTEN, p.36 ("The Chaldaeans [*Al-kaldàniyùn*] ... are they who are called 'Sabians [and] Harrànians'. Their members live in Harràn and Iraq. They adopted the name *sàbi'ùn* at the time of the caliph al-Ma'mùn"); AL-NADIM, *Fihrist*, ET DODGE, p.745 ("... *Harnàniyah al-Kaldàniyyin*, known as the Sabians"). ABU YUSUF, the head-judge of the Caliph Harùn al-Rashid, states that the people of Harràn are Nabataeans and refugees from Greece (*Kitàb al-kharàj*, 5th ed. Cairo 1396 H., p.43). According to AL-MAS'UDI, *Kitàb al-tanbih wa al-'ishràf*, ed. cit. (above n.150), p.31, the term "Nabataeans" refers to the Syriac-speaking people (cf. SPENCER-TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity among the Arabs*, p.146 f. and notes, for other references and details), whereas he uses the term *Kaldàniyùn* for denoting people who live in the marshes between Wasit and Basra in Southern Iraq, namely the group of Sabians opposed by him to the Harrànians and elsewhere denoted by him with the term *Kimariyùn*. The relations which FARIS-GLIDDEN, "The Meaning of Koranic *Hanif*", p.17 f., deduce from these traditions is worth of attention: "It is also noteworthy that the Nabataean and Koranic usage of *hanif* in a favorable sense is paralleled in other Semitic languages only in the Eastern Aramaic dialect of Harràn, with which it has other linguistic affinities. Moreover the religion of the Harrànians as a Syro-Hellenistic syncretism has a good deal in common with the worship of the Nabataeans; it is also not without significance that the Aramaeans of Harràn are frequently referred to in Islamic literature as Nabataeans (Nabat), as well as Chaldaeans (Kaldàniyun). What little is known of the traditions of these people fits very well into the general picture of their culture as one sees it reflected from other sources: Nonnos' myth of the Nabataean Lykourgos and Theodore Bar Koni's story of the origin of *hanpùtho* at Athens are of the same tendentious character". The latter story, in particular, deserves special attention, because what the texts literally recites appears at first sight quite problematic: "Il en est qui ont dit que c'est après l'olivier qui poussa à Athènes qu'ils [the *Hanpè*]reçurent cette appellation, car olivier en langue grecque se dit *elaià* et païen *halious* (*Héllen* ?)" (THEODORE BAR KONI, *Liber Scholiorum*, ed. ADDAI SCHER, *CSCO, Script. Syri* 26, p.285; FT by R. HESPEL - R. DRAGUET, *CSCO, Script. Syri* 188, p.213): we believe, indeed, that the only way for understanding this passage is to see in the last word not a wrong

transcription of the term *Héllen* as the translators suggest, but a hint to the cult of Hypsistos, whose name in Hebrew is just *Elyon* (cf. above n.272).

336) *Picatrix. The Latin Version of the Ghàyat al-Hakim*, ed. PINGREE, p.46.

337) PSEUDO-MAJRITI, *Das Ziel des Weisens*, ed. RITTER, p.195; GT by RITTER-PLESSNER, p.206 (text also in DOZY-De-GOEJE, “Nouveaux Documents pour l’Etude de la Religion des Harràniens”, p.300, followed by a FT, p.341). It is tempting to think that the “leaders of the Sabians” and the “servants of the temples” eventually denote here the same class of persons, namely the Sabians in general *tout-court*. According to several Muslim authors the Sabians had temples of different shape in honour of the seven planets (plus five else, all of circular shape, in honour of Abstract Entities such as the Primal Cause, the Reason etc.): AL-MAS’UDI, *Murùj*, FT IV, p.61 (FT by PELLAT, II, p.535) ; AL-DIMASHQI, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, FT p.41 f.; AL-SHAHRASTANI, *Milal*, GT p.76 f. (FT *Les Sabéens de Shahrastànì*, by G. MONNOT, p.171 f.); cf. SEGAL, “Pagan Syriac Monuments in the Vilayet of Urfa”, p.115 ff., who believes to recognize such shrines in the archaeological remains of Sumatar Harabesi; HJARPE, *Les Sabéens Harràniens*, pp.90-2, who usefully compares these Medieval texts. The best introduction to the subject is the more than once quoted “Rituel Sabéen”, pp.1-44, by CORBIN (repr. in Idem, *Temple et Contemplation*, Paris 1980), who connects the idea of the heavenly temples (and of the shrines built in order to be their earthly representations) to the great spiritual Shi’ite and/or Ismailian tradition: according to these doctrines, the Sabians represent the first religious group during the present (hiero-)historical cycle to which the divine Revelation has been transmitted, followed by the Brahmans, the Zoroastrians, the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims (see once again H. CORBIN, “Epiphanie Divine et Naissance Spirituelle dans la Gnose Ismailienne”, *ErJb* 23 (1954), p.186; Idem, *Temps Cyclique et Gnose Ismailienne*, Paris 1982, p.110; or also MARQUET, “Sabéens et Ikhwàn al-Safà”, *SI* 24 [1966], p.53 n.1; but see also above at n.195 the comparative table, for the relation Moon-Sabians-Revelation). Thus, it is not difficult to understand why the Sabians might be seen - as the *Ghàya*’s passage seems to state - in terms of the Primeval Custodians/Servants of the Temple. As it is well-known, the expression “Servants of the Most-High God” is used by Luke in *Acts*, and precisely when the demon-possessed slave girl denotes Paul and Silas at Philippi just by means of such an attribute: the reason why Paul appears greatly troubled and irritated by this fact, so that he does not waver to exorcize the demon provoking the bitter reaction of her masters for the consequent loss of money, is explained by P.R. TREBILCO, “Paul and Silas ‘Servants of the Most High God’ (*Acts*, 16, 16-18)”, *JSNT* 36 (1982), p.62, in interesting terms: “Only to a Jew or Judaizer would the title *Theos Hypsistos* have suggested that Yahweh was meant ... Paul’s annoyance and consequent action were caused by the fact that the girl was confusing those to whom he was preaching. His anger was aroused by the fact that she was exposing his own proclamation to a syncretistic misunderstanding. He acted to remove the danger”. For the concept of “Servant”, “Slave” (Ar. *abd*; Hebr. *ebed*) in religious sense, see BIKERMAN, “The Name of Christians”, pp.119-23.

338) D. KELLERMANN, art. “*Gur, ger* etc.”, *TWAT*, I, p.989 f. Talmudic references also in REYNOLDS-TANNENBAUM, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisia*, p.48 and ns.168 and 171.

339) The usual Etymologies of the name are unsatisfying at all: “God (is) Seven” (*El plus Shabbath*), or “To swear (upon the name of) God” are in fact completely meaningless. We think that this name more than as an example of inter-linguistic compounds such as *Malchos Ioustos* or *’Ausos o kai theodòros* - where the Arabic name *’Awd* corresponds to Greek *dòron* (cit. by SPENCER TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity among the Arabs*, p.76) - is to be seen as an exact equivalent of *Theosebés*: even if a feminine noun *sabeth* with the meaning of “servant/fearer/worshipper/sympathizer/converted (to the cult) of One Most-High God” is not attested in Hebrew and/or in Aramaic, we know at least the existence of a name *Sabet*, found in a Christian Greek epithaph in Egypt (cf. *SEG* XLIV, no.1463, n.3: “female name?”), as well as of an Aramaic name *Tsabet* transcribed in this form by WUTHNOW, *Die Semitischen Menschnennamen*, p.168 (for ‘ts’ = *sadé* cf. above, n.106).

340) GELB-LANDSBERGER-OPPENHEIM, *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, XVI, p.46. The possibility of an Accadian origin of the name had been once advanced by MARQUET, “Sabéens et Ikhwàn al-Safà”, *SI* 25 (1966), p.109 n.1.

341) See the references quoted above in relation to the terms “proselyte” and *ger*, p.9 n.60, p.37 n.338 and *passim*.

342) *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, XVI, p.47: “SA ERIN.E.DINGIR.DIDLI from among men from various temples – Jean, Sumer et Akkad 204:8; 203:7; three men SA ERIN MES E.dUTU from among the personnel of the temple of Samas CT 8 8b:12, also ERIN.HI.A E.DINGIR.RI.E.NE OECT 3 61:9 (let.); 5 ERIN.H.A GIR.SE.GA *dNergal sa Maskan-sabra* TCL 18 113:12”; the last quotation comes from Mari’s Archives: “oil given out *ana pasàs sa-bi-im inùma isin dSmas* for the anointing of the personnel on the occasion of the festival of Samas ARM 7 13:7” (p.49).