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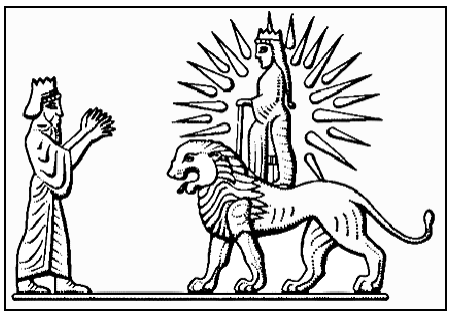

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"A 'New' Source for Late Antique Paganism"

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Published in Melammu Symposia 5:

Robert Rollinger and Christoph Ulf (eds.),

Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World.
Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction.
Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Symposium of the
Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project.
Held in Innsbruck, Austria, October 3rd-8th, 2002
(Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2004), pp. 408-19.
Publisher: http://www.steiner-verlag.de/

A "NEW" SOURCE FOR LATE ANTIQUE PAGANISM

Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila

Our sources on Late Antique paganism in rural Northern Iraq are few and far between. A handful of inscriptions in a variety of languages, some notes in Christian hagiographies which are notoriously difficult to date and to evaluate and some problematic accounts in Arabic historical texts are the material with which scholars are wont to work, and the results are meagre enough.

Yet there is a rather large corpus which might be of value in studying the intellectual atmosphere of the area in Late Antiquity and Early Islam. This "Nabatean corpus" – which has nothing to do with the Nabateans of Petra[1] – has been a bone of contention for almost a century and a half. This is not the place to recount the history of Western scholarship on the issue or to review its results,[2] but suffice it to say that we seem to have reason to date this corpus, or at least the main parts of it, to the sixth century A.D. or soon thereafter. The original texts were written in some sort of Aramaic, called "Ancient Syriac" in the text itself, and they were translated into Arabic by Ibn Waḥshiyya (d. 318 A.H. = 930 A.D.).[3] The purpose of this paper is not to prove the relative authenticity of the corpus, which has been done by me, at least to my own satisfaction, in another paper,[4] but to give a short description of the varied contents of the main text of the corpus, the *Nabatean Agriculture* (*al-Filāḥa an-Nabaṭiyya*, abbreviated in the following as Nab. Agr.).[5] This work is a large compendium of agronomical literature, in the modern edition taking up almost 1500 pages.

The major part of the text is of botanical and agronomical interest only, but the pseudonymous authors of the original,[6] as well as the Arabic translator, Ibn Waḥshiyya, added to this much material that is valuable for the study of Late

1 *Nabaṭ* in Arabic refers to the non-Arabic rural population of the Near East, and especially Iraq, who spoke different Aramaic dialects.

2 The question of the authenticity of this corpus has been studied in Hämeen-Anttila (2002/2003) and the history of earlier scholarship in Hämeen-Anttila (2003 b)

3 It might be mentioned in passing that the arguments adduced by Toufic Fahd in favour of this relative authenticity of the corpus (see the articles of Fahd, collected in Fahd 1998), are, to my mind, far from conclusive and often erratic. Nevertheless, the main text of the corpus does date from Late Antiquity as proven, I hope, by my own study, Hämeen-Anttila forthcoming a. The translator's preface where it is told by the translator, Ibn Waḥshiyya, how the text was translated into Arabic, has been translated in Hämeen-Anttila 2002b. By "relative authenticity," I mean that the text was indeed translated from some Syriac or Aramaic dialect into Arabic by Ibn Waḥshiyya. The text itself claims to be considerably older, and in this sense, of course, it is not authentic.

4 Hämeen-Anttila 2002/2003.

5 Among the more important texts of the Nabatean corpus are *Kitāb as-Sumūm* and *Kitāb Asrār al-falak*.

6 The original is told in the Preface to have been a multilayered compilation, the main authors of the layers being Ṣaghrīth, Yanbūshādh and Qūthāmā, the final editor of the "Ancient Syriac" original. None of these names can be identified and are clearly "coded" (see Hämeen-Anttila 2002/2003).

Antique paganism, semipopular philosophy and ancient folklore, to mention the most important fields of interest of the authors and the translator. The themes presented below have partly been studied by me *in extenso* in other articles, or will be so in future ones.[7]

The magico-religious themes are very prominent throughout the work. The deities are astral and the names used for them are the standard Arabic names for the "stars" (the Sun, the Moon, and the five visible planets). Other deities mentioned by name in the text are Nasr and Tammūz; the former is mentioned only briefly (Nab. Agr., p. 296) in the description of the ritual lamentation of the latter (Nab. Agr., pp. 296-298),[8] which is the most accurate description of the ritual known from Arabic sources and also the last detailed testimony for the *Weiterleben* of the ritual lamentation.

Tammūz and Nasr are, however, not typical of the religious worldview of the text. The other deities are astral, and the text mentions several prayers to be addressed to these deities, e.g., a lengthy one to Saturn, given in the Preface of Ṣaghrīth (Nab. Agr., pp. 10-11) which opens the "Ancient Syriac" original and is preceded only by the translator's Preface. The passage shows a clear tendency towards monotheism:[9]

The Preface of Ṣaghrīth

Glorification and exalting, prayer (*ṣalāt*) and service (*ʿibāda*) be from us, whilst we are standing upright on our feet, to our god, the living (*al-ḥayy*), the eternal (*al-qadīm*), who has always been and will always be (*lam yazal wa-lā yazāl*), the only possessor of lordship over all things, the great god (*al-ilāh al-kabīr*).

There is no god but god (*Allāh*) alone and there is no companion to him,[10] the great, the everlasting in his heaven, whose power is effective. All might, majesty and greatness belong solely to him. He comprises everything, he has power over

7 I am preparing a translation of the non-agronomical passages of the text, which will appear in a few years.

8 The passage has been translated in Hämeen-Anttila 2002a, together with other relevant material from both the Nabatean corpus and other Arabic sources.

9 The beginning of the passage would seem to be addressing the Sun but later it becomes obvious that the god referred to is Saturn (Zuḥal). It seems to me that the prayer uses the expressions of solar monotheism to soothe another god, Saturn. Cf. also the passage translated below, footnote 20. A syncretistic system such as that exhibited by the Nab. Agr., should not be expected to express itself systematically with clearcut slots for each god in the pantheon. On the contrary, these systems tend towards fluidity and flexibility, so that the role of a god in a certain context very much depends on the focus of the passage in question. Cf. also Fauth 1995, 31-32.

10 This Islamic formula is absent from several manuscripts. Note that the use of Islamic vocabulary in the Arabic text does not, at least not necessarily, imply an Islamic origin. In translating the text into Arabic, Ibn Waḥshiyya did not have any standardized pagan religious vocabulary at his disposal but had to use Islamic vocabulary which he may, furthermore, have used on purpose, to make the text more palatable for the mainly Islamic readership.

everything and to him belongs everything, both visible and invisible. To him belongs everything on earth and on high.[11] He furnished [12] the earth (with life) from his life and made it alive, and it remains in existence (*baqiyat*) through his continued existence (*bi-baqā'ihi*). He furnished water with his might and his power and made it exist (*abqā*), so that it persists (*dāma*) through his persistence. He made firm the earth and it will remain so for all eternity, and he made water run its course (*ajrā*) like he runs his course, so that the water runs alive like his life,[13] cold because of the greatness of his power (*sulṭān*) over coldness. The earth is heavy (*thaqulat*) in addition to being in existence (*baqāʾ*), because of the heaviness of his movement. If he wished it, he could make everything into something other than what it is. But he is wise and acts upon his wise potency (*quwwa*)[14] and he is knowledgeable and his knowledge permeates everything (*al-kull*).

Blessed art thou, O lord of the heaven and everything else. Your noble and beautiful names (*asmāʾuka l-karīmatu l-ḥusnā*)[15] be hallowed. We serve you and pray (to you) because of your eternity (*qidam*) and nobility,[16] and we ask you by your names and your eternity and your nobility that you keep our reason firmly on its course, as long as we are alive, and that you treat gently with our bodies, after life has left them, in (the state of) corruption and that you drive away worms from our flesh (after our death) because you are an eternal and merciful lord.

Yet you cannot show your mercy because of your sternness because you can also be a remorseless tyrant. Your arm is long and not slow in making your deeds effective. You are the lord: when you give someone something, there is no one who could detain it and there is no one who could give it (against your will). You are the lord and the only possessor of lordship, the sole possessor of power (*sulṭān*), the lord of the planets and revolving stars (*rabb al-kawākib waʾn-nujūm ad-dāʾira*) which move their circular movement (*as-sāʾira fī dawāʾir*). They flee the sound of your movement and they are afraid because of you.

11 Variant: on the low earths and in what the highest sphere surrounds and what is between them and below the soil.

12 In one manuscript a variant passage begins here which emphasizes that god brought into being all existence through his various qualities, including his knowledge and his mercy (e.g., "He extended the existence from the overflow of His existence and made the spheres circulate through the greatness of his power (…)").

13 The mention of living waters should not mislead the reader. Although there is a certain resemblance between Mandaean religion and the religious beliefs mentioned in the Nab. Agr., there are also obvious differences. The Nabateans were neither Mandaeans nor Ḥarrānian Ṣābians, although all three religious groups obviously derived many of their religious ideas from the same or similar sources. The religious map of the Near East contained these three pagan groups which prospered well into Islamic times and, in the case of Mandaeans, continue even today.

14 The text reads: *fāʿilun bi-QWTH ʾL-ḤKMH*, which Fahd emends in his edition to *fāʿilun bi-quwwatihi *l-ḥakīma* (*ʾL-ḤK<Y>MH*). One might as well emend this to: *bi-QWT[[H]] ʾL-ḤKMH* and read: *bi-quwwati l-ḥikma* "with the power of Wisdom." Still, the emendation of Fahd is possible and may even be preferable.

15 The expression *al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā* is strongly Qurʾānic (Qur. 7:180).

16 Or: generosity (*karam*).

[p. 11] We ask you to keep us safe from your anger and to hold your assaultive power (*saṭwa*) from us and to have mercy on us and to preserve us from your great wrath (*shirra*). O god (*Allāhumma*), we hold your assaults from us by your beautiful names (*bi-asmāʾika l-ḥusnā*); you have mercy on whosoever uses them as a means to your mercy. So have mercy on us, have mercy on us by your might, by your high, lofty and majestic name, O you who are high, lofty and majestic. It is upon you, O noble one (*al-karīm ʿalayka*). By my life, we ask you to have mercy on us. Amen.

Beware (pl.) of the evil (*sharr*) of this god when he is angered or is located to the west of the Sun or is veiled by its rays or is in the middle of its retrogradation (*rujūʿ*). Pray then to him with this prayer which we have just prayed. While you are praying, offer to his idol (*ṣanam*) a burnt offering (*dakhkhinū*), consisting of old hides, grease, strips of leather (*qudūd*) and dead bats (*al-khushshāf*[17] *al-mawtā*). Burn (*aḥriqū*) for him fourteen dead bats and an equal amount of rats. Then take their ashes and prostrate yourselves (*fa-sjudū*) on them in front[18] of his idol. Prostrate yourselves to him on a black stone with black sand and seek refuge with him from his evil, because, O my brethren and beloved ones, he is the cause (*sabab*) of the perishing of all that perishes, the cause of the decay of all that decays, the cause of the perdition of all that is destroyed, (the cause of) the grief of all grieved ones and the weeping of all weeping ones. He is the lord of[19] evil and sin and filth and dirt and poverty.

This is what he does to men (*abnāʾal-bashar*) when he is angered, but when he is content he gives them the remaining existence (*baqāʾ*), long life, fame after their death, acceptance in the eyes of those who look at them and sweetness of speech.[20] His anger is (to be afraid in situations) like I just described to you (sg.),

17 According to Lane, s.v., *khushshāf* should be singular, but Ibn Waḥshiyya uses it as a collective noun with the nomen unitatis *khushshāfa*.

18 The text reads: *bayna ṣanamihi*. This most probably is a mistake for *bayna <yaday> ṣanamihi*.

19 The text reads: *wa-hāribu sharrin waʾl-fisq* etc., which does not quite make sense. The translation is based on an emended reading: *wa-*huwa rabb [ash]-sharr waʾl-fisq*.

20 Two of the manuscripts give here an additional passage of a strong monotheistic tendency, where Zuḥal is seen as an instrument of the Highest God to whom he is totally subservient. The passage reads:

Then he said: Beware opposing, disobeying or angering this (read *hādhā* for *hunā*) god because nothing can stand against his anger. Pray (*ʿalaykum biʾṣ-ṣalāti waʾd-duʿā*) to this great god who is the lord of lords, and stand humbly in front of him, seek refuge in him from him and declare that all might and power belong to him for there is no might nor power except his (*fa-innahu lā ḥawla wa-lā quwwata illā bihi*).

Prostrate yourselves to him in his temples which have been erected for his service (*fī hayākilihi l-manṣūbati li-ʿibādatihi*) and offer to him pure offerings, pure of all filth and free from all impurity (*wa-qarribū lahu min al-qarābīni z-zakiyyati ṭ-ṭāhira min al-adnāsi al-bariyyati min al-akdār*). With these you will receive his blessing (*baraka*) and you may wish for his mercy.

Beware Zuḥal because he is one of his servants and his subjects and his creatures (*min marbūbātihi wa-musakhkharātihi wa-makhlūqātihi*). His station is known and his cycles (*adwāruhu*) are preserved (*maḥfūẓa*). Seek refuge in this god from his evil and his ominousness (*shuʾm*). His actions among men are done with the permission of his Lord.

but his contentment is (to be expected) when he is to the east of the Sun or in the middle of his station (*istiqāma*) or in places which agree with his actions or in the full speed of his travel (*fī surʿati sayrihi*) or in ascendance in the cycle of his ascendance (*fī ṣuʿūdihi fī dāirati ṣuʿūdihi*). — Abū Bakr ibn Waḥshiyya says: This means: in the sphere of his zenith (*fī falaki awjihi*).[21]

If you pray to him when he is angered, repeat your prayer and the sacrifice (*qurbān*) when he is (again) content and remind him of the earlier prayer and repeat its mention to him, so that you might come off well from his evil. Amen.

Know that he is the one who gives prosperity to the soil and it is he who gives the growth or its opposite to the plants. He revealed (*awḥā)* to the Moon[22] what I have put down in this book of mine and the Moon revealed it to his (own) idol, and I was taught it by the idol of the Moon, just like I now teach it to you (pl.). Preserve this because it is your life on which you rely and (on it depends) the growth of your fields and your fruits which are the basic preservation (*mādda*) of your life and your hope, during your life, of comfort, affluence, safety [p. 12] and general health (*al-ʿāfiya al-kulliyya*).

Know that I have prayed to this god, Zuḥal, and in my prayer I have asked his idol to benefit with this book of mine everyone who reads it. The idol revealed (*awḥā*) to me: "Your prayer (*duʿāʾ*) has been heard and your offering has been accepted." I did this because I felt sorry for the sons of my kind (*abnāʾ jinsī*) for the anguish of their scant living and the abundance of their misery.

Seek refuge from this (misery) with the Sun by long and repeated litanies (*taʿawwudh*) so that he may perhaps benefit you because he is beneficial to you, and seek refuge with this god [Zuḥal] from his evil with long litanies (*taʿawwudh*) because he will benefit you against scant living and the sorrow caused by that.

The text of the Nab. Agr. consists of passages of different intellectual levels, ranging from popular religion of the local farmers to more highflying philosophical speculation derived from Hellenistic ideas. Accordingly, the astral speculation is of two types. Aside from the more magically flavoured astral religion, which is exemplified by the prayers, intended to influence the gods, there are passages based on astral fatalism: the stars and their mutual relations shed almost mechanistically their influence on the earth.

Variety is also caused by monotheistic tendencies within the text, where sometimes other stars are seen more or less as various potencies or intermediaries of one Supreme God. Whether this is a local development of "pagan monotheism"[23]

When he is angered because his Lord is angered, then (upon men will come) weeping and wailing (? *nathīj*), sorrow and lamenting, poverty and humiliation, anguish and impurity, dirt and blackness and stench. But when he is pleased because his Lord is pleased, then (upon men will come) length of life (read *al-aʿmār* for the text's *al-aʿmāl*) and elevation of name after death, fame and acceptance in the eyes of those who look at them and eloquence of speech.

21 The additional notes by Ibn Waḥshiyya are usually clearly marked, as here.

22 Variant: to me.

23 For the tendency towards often solar monotheism in Late Antiquity, see, e.g., Teixidor 1977, Tubach 1986, Fauth 1995, and Athanassiadi–Frede 1999.

or has been caused by Jewish or Christian influence is difficult to say, but a certain "Biblical" influence is obvious in the text, especially in the use of Biblical names such as Adam (Ādamā), Seth (Īshīthā), Noah (Nūḥā) and Abraham (Ibrāhīm), who obviously owe their names and some of their characteristics to Biblical tradition, although they are far removed from their Biblical namesakes.[24]

Likewise, the text discusses in several places the question of prophecy and revelation, including incubation (e.g., Nab. Agr., pp. 1238-1246). It remains to be studied to what extent these are indebted to Jewish or Christian influences, and to what extent they may reveal vestiges of a local pagan tradition.[25]

In addition to this "higher" level of religion, we have a wide selection of magical operations, charms and talismans described in the text.[26] Some of these, like many of the charms against hailstorm (e.g., Nab. Agr., 1062-1065), go back to Hellenistic sources,[27] some obviously are purely speculative with little basis in local habits, but the majority most probably describe existing habits in the countryside and thus contain valuable additions to our knowledge of the magico-religious beliefs of the area and, especially, the peasants, who otherwise are not particularly visible in the preserved literature.

An interesting case of strong affinity with Late Antiquity as known from other sources[28] is the strong position of itinerant magicians (*saḥara*), whose black magic is feared, and though they clearly dislike them, the authors do not dare to oppose them openly (e.g., Nab. Agr., 147, and elsewhere).

The magical easily changes into philosophical speculation. An especially interesting case of this is the creation of an artificial man,[29] which may have been influenced by, or have influenced, the Jewish tradition which ultimately led to the Golem legend, so widely spread in Jewish folklore. In the Nab. Agr., the creation of an artificial man is placed within the larger context of spontaneous generation, well known from Greek sources.

The Hellenistic influence is at its most obvious at the philosophical level of the book. The philosophical ideas of the authors are dominated by the *Elementenlehre* and the theory of humours, as interpreted by them, and interwoven with astral speculation. This layer consists of highly individual and sometimes aberrant philosophy, which does not reveal a great philosophical mind, but might be of interest concerning the reception of Hellenistic philosophy in semi-learned circles, perhaps among the minor landed aristocracy. Among the various philosophical

24 For Adam, see the mythical story of Adam and Wheat (Nab. Agr., 448-453), translated in Hämeen-Anttila forthcoming a.

25 One should note both the Manichaean (as well as the Elchasaite) and the Islamic parallels, which show how widely the idea of revelation was spread roughly at the time of the compilation of this text. It should also be noted that the Islamic revelation is not simply a branch of the Biblical tradition but most obviously was also influenced by a local, Arabian tradition. See Hämeen-Anttila 2000.

26 These are very briefly described in Hämeen-Anttila 1999.

27 Rodgers 1980.

28 Cf., e.g., Trombley 1993-1994, II, 41 ("…such beliefs became a source of great anxiety"), and passim, see the index, s.v. *sorcerers* and *sorcery*

29 The passages have been translated and studied in Hämeen-Anttila 2003a.

asides there is a long discussion on the soul (Nab. Agr., 918-932), which is worth comparing to Classical and Islamic sources, although it remains philosophically speaking inferior to the general level of philosophy at the time. Yet, it seems to me that the diffusion of philosophical ideas outside the spheres of professional philosophers is an understudied field and would deserve more attention than has hitherto been given to it.

If we continue to review some main aspects of the book from the sacral to the secular, we next come to various rituals and regulations. There is an interesting description of New Year's Eve rituals (Nab. Agr., 538-541) which, broadly speaking, coincides with what we know of the Ḥarrānian pagans down to the Islamic times, albeit differing in details, so that the description cannot have been taken from any Arabic source describing the Ḥarrānians but must be independent of that tradition.[30] Likewise, there are descriptions of idols and their worshiping, communal prayers, feasts, fasts, temples and the services therein, the use of cultic music, incubation and dream oracles, and various other themes. Most of these passages are relatively short and sometimes difficult to set into any context, but in general they offer much material for study. The veneration of sacred trees receives some attention, and it seems that the word "idol"(*ṣanam*) may often, in fact, refer to sacred trees, which act as mediators of divine revelation. Cultic and agricultural calendars, which we also know from Syriac tradition, are discussed in the book (e.g., Nab. Agr., 207-209).

The authors of the book seem to have been specifically interested in burial customs and the problem of corruption of bodies.[31] They discuss not only "Nabatean" burial customs but also review those of other peoples of the time. Both mummification and burial in salt to attain mummification receive some attention, as does cremation and burials in jars or sarcophagi.

Food regulations,[32] including some resembling the Pythagorean ones, are also found in the text, as well as information on regular peasant diet and even substitute foods which may be eaten during times of famine. The regulations, however, do not contain any prohibition against eating pork or drinking wine, thus showing little affinity with Islamic regulations.

Another group of themes worth mentioning are those related to folklore and literature. Travellers' tales, stories about jinn, literary debates,[33] and many other stories are found in the text. A specific mention might be made of the story (Nab. Agr., 1254-1256) of a courtier who is ordered by the king to kill one of the royal wives but who spares her life and later returns her to the king and proves that he himself is impotent. This "Snow White episode"[34] is known from several Islamic sources, often told of the Sāsānid king Ardashīr and his courtier, and the story

30 This has been studied in Hämeen-Anttila 2002a, together with the Tammūz ritual.

31 I have studied this topic in a Finnish article (Hämeen-Anttila forthcoming b), later to be published in an enlarged English version.

32 Studied in Hämeen-Anttila forthcoming a.

33 It has usually been argued that no Syriac debates were directly translated into Arabic, and the examples of the Nab. Agr. seem to be the only known exception to this.

34 Aarne-Thompson K. 512.2.

usually contains a reference to selfcastration by the courtier before receiving the custody of the woman to put an end to any possible gossiping concerning the wife's fidelity during the time of her absence.[35] The theme of selfcastration is already known from Lucian's *De Syria Dea* (the story of Kombabos, 19-27), where it is told as an aetiological myth for the selfcastration of the *Galloi*. The version of Lucian, though, lacks the "Snow White episode;" here Kombabos has to castrate himself after the king has put his wife in his charge during the building of a new temple, and the courtier castrates himself, knowing that the amorous lady will bring him under suspicion if he will not be able to prove his chastity.[36] This brief review by no means exhausts all the material of the work, but it has, I hope, demonstrated the importance and interest of this little-known text as well as the other texts in the Nabatean corpus. The bulky Arabic text itself is not easily available to non-Arabists, and my aim is to produce a selected and annotated translation, containing the non-agronomical material of the text.

The analysis of this text as well as the whole Nabatean corpus is complicated by the pseudonymity of the authors, the various layers of the text and the process of editing and translating through which it has gone before reaching the final stage, the Arabic text from 930. This complexity has perhaps been one of the main reasons why the text has not received the attention it deserves, as well as

35 Cf. Ritter 1978, 511, with reference to aṭ-Ṭabarī (see Bosworth 1999, 24-26, and Nöldeke 1879, 26-30); ps.-al-Majrīṭī, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, 389-390 (and its translation, Ritter–Plessner 1962, 397-399: a considerable proportion of the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* is, like this passage, taken from the Nab. Agr.); al-Aḥdab, *Dhayl Thamarāt al-awrāq* II, 257-260 (here King Ardavan has been corrupted into *malik Baḥr al-Urdunn*, the King of Jordan), and ʿAṭṭārʾs *Ilāhī-nāme*, vv. 5991-6049 (*Ḥikāyat-i Ardashīr*, 20/4) (translated in Granata 1990, 368-371). To these one may add Firdausī, *Shāhnāma*, 479-481 (translated in Levy 1985, 271-272), and ad-Dīnawarīʾs *al-Akhbār aṭ-ṭiwāl*, 85-86. Late Islamic variants and parallels without reference to Ardashīr are relatively easy to find, see, e.g., ʿAṭṭār's *Manṭiq aṭ-ṭayr*, vv. 4293-4455 (translated in Avery 1998), and Chauvin 1901, 208. In Islamic sources the story is usually told of Ardashīr-I Pāpakān and the daughter of King Ardavan. The story is found in the Pahlavi legendary history *Kārnāmag-i Ardashīr* (see Nöldeke 1878, 57-63), but without the motif of selfcastration. It may be relevant for the dating of the Nab. Agr. to draw attention to the fact that in Islamic literature the motif of selfcastration is prominent, whereas in the older Pahlavi story, as in the Nab. Agr., this is missing. Thus, the pre-Islamic *Kārnāmag* and the Nab. Agr. seem to belong to one branch, the later Islamic versions to another.

An early, related version of this tale is found in *Ahiqar*, see, e.g., Lindenberger 1985, 496. 497, which predates all other versions and provides an indigenous starting point for the development of the motif, although this version naturally lacks any references to potential jealousy and, consequently, to selfcastration or impotence. Yet it is worth noting that the slave killed in Ahiqar's stead is a eunuch.

36 Note that the pre-Islamic date of the story of Ardashīr does not necessarily indicate that the story in the Nab. Agr. was taken from Persia. On the contrary, the versions of *Ahiqar* and Lucian prove that similar tales were circulating in Syria even earlier, and it may thus be that the story of Ardashīr itself has been influenced by some Syro-Mesopotamian tradition. Thus the version of the Nab. Agr. may well be indigenious. The name Kombabos in Lucian is also higly interesting and its possible relation to either Humbaba, the monstruous guardian of the Forest of Cedars in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, or the goddess Cybele has been a matter of controversy.

perhaps the fact that it has fallen between two fields of study: the text may mainly interest scholars in the field of Late Antique studies, but it has been available only in the Arabic original, which did not much interest the Arabists of the 20th century, with a few exceptions. I hope that the English translation may provide an impetus for future studies on the text by non-Arabists.

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