

# Studia graeco-arabica

7

---

2017

### *Editorial Board*

Mohammad Ali Amir Moezzi, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris  
Carmela Baffioni, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli  
Sebastian Brock, Oriental Institute, Oxford  
Charles Burnett, The Warburg Institute, London  
Hans Daiber, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt a. M.  
Cristina D'Ancona, Università di Pisa  
Thérèse-Anne Druart, The Catholic University of America, Washington  
Gerhard Endress, Ruhr-Universität Bochum  
Richard Goulet, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris  
Steven Harvey, Bar-Ilan University, Jerusalem  
Henri Hugonnard-Roche, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris  
Remke Kruk, Universiteit Leiden  
Concetta Luna, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa  
Alain-Philippe Segonds (†)  
Richard C. Taylor, Marquette University, Milwaukee (WI)

### *Staff*

Cristina D'Ancona, Elisa Coda, Giulia Guidara, Issam Marjani, Cecilia Martini Bonadeo

### *Submissions*

Submissions are invited in every area of the studies on the transmission of philosophical and scientific texts from Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and early modern times. Papers in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish are published. Prospect authors are invited to check the *Guidelines* on the website of the journal, and to address their proposals to the Editor in chief.

### *Peer Review Criteria*

*Studia graeco-arabica* follows a double-blind peer review process. Authors should avoid putting their names in headers or footers or refer to themselves in the body or notes of the article; the title and abstract alone should appear on the first page of the submitted article. All submitted articles are read by the editorial staff. Manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to our readership are sent for formal review to at least one reviewer. *Studia graeco-arabica* does not release referees' identities to authors or to other reviewers. The journal is committed to rapid editorial decisions.

### *Subscription orders*

Information on subscription rates for the print edition of Volume 7 (2017), claims and customers service: [redazione@pacineditore.it](mailto:redazione@pacineditore.it)

Web site: <http://learningroads.cfs.unipi.it>

Service Provider: Università di Pisa, ICT - Servizi di Rete Ateneo

ISSN 2239-012X (Online)

Registration at the law court of Pisa, 18/12, November 23, 2012.

Editor in chief Cristina D'Ancona ([cristina.dancona@unipi.it](mailto:cristina.dancona@unipi.it))

Mailing address: Dipartimento di Civiltà e Forme del Sapere, via Pasquale Paoli 15, 56126 Pisa, Italia.



© Copyright 2017 by Industrie Grafiche Pacini Editore, Pisa.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the Publisher. The Publisher remains at the disposal of the rightholders, and is ready to make up for unintentional omissions. *Studia graeco-arabica* cannot be held responsible for the scientific opinions of the authors publishing in it.

### *Cover*

Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḡawī 300, f. 1v  
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, *grec* 1853, f. 186v

# *The Šābi'ans of Šā'id al-Andalusī*

Godefroid de Callataÿ\*

## *Abstract*

The *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* opens with an account of the seven primeval nations taken from Mas'ūdī's *Tanbīh*. At the end of Šā'id's version, however, we are told that “these seven nations, which together constituted the whole of mankind, were all Šābi'ans” – an indication not found in the Oriental model. Several references to Šābi'ans also appear in the core of the *Ṭabaqāt*, a definitely more original section of the work in which the author reports the achievements of the eight nations (Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Arabs, and Jews) which in his view contributed to the improvement of science. The present paper examines all these passages. We try to determine where the author of the *Ṭabaqāt* situates these groups of Šābi'ans in the overall history of the nations, and we ask ourselves to what extent these groups may be regarded as continuators or remnants of the primordial Šābi'ans.

In 460/1068, not long before Toledo passed under Christian control, the Muslim scholar Šā'id al-Andalusī, who had been a *qāḍī* in this city for some time, put an end to the redaction of a book in which he purported to review the scientific achievements of the different nations of the world. This is his *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* (*Categories of Nations*), a work whose pioneering position in the historiography of science from a world perspective needs no further elaboration.<sup>1</sup> The structure of the treatise, the only one of Šā'id's works to have come down to us, is extraordinarily simple. Having left out of his review the nations and races of the earth that in his view did not contribute to the improvement of science – most remarkably, the Chinese and the Turks –, Šā'id retains eight nations, reserving one chapter for each in the rest of his *opus*. The order in which these eight nations are dealt with is the following: (1) the Indians (*fī l-hind*); (2) the Persians (*fī l-furs*); (3) the Chaldaeans (*inda l-kaldān*); (4) the Greeks (*fī l-yūnān*); (5) the Romans (*fī l-rūm*);

---

\* The present contribution was elaborated from an oral presentation given on 17 March 2017 at the University of Pisa as part of the “Learning Roads” project conducted by Cristina D'Ancona. My warmest thanks to Cristina and to the other participants of this session for various helpful observations made during the post-talk discussion. Research for this article benefited from the support of both the ARC project ‘*Speculum Arabicum*: Objectifying the contribution of the Arab-Muslim world to the history of sciences and ideas: the sources and resources of medieval encyclopaedism’ (Communauté française de Belgique – Actions de Recherche Concertées 2012-2017) and the ERC project ‘The Origin and Early Development of Philosophy in tenth-century al-Andalus: the impact of ill-defined materials and channels of transmission’ (ERC 2016, AdG 740618) held at the University of Louvain (Université catholique de Louvain), from 2017 to 2022.

<sup>1</sup> See for instance: M. Plessner, “Der Astronom und Historiker Ibn Šā'id al-Andalusī und seine Geschichte der Wissenschaften”, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 31 (1956), pp. 235-57, here p. 235: “Er [Šā'id] hat als erster eine Weltgeschichte der Wissenschaften versucht und damit ein Werk geschenkt, das als einziges unter allen älteren wissenschaftshistorischen Büchern in arabischer Sprache, soweit sie uns erhalten sind, einen trotz – oder wegen – seiner Kürze grösstenteils lesbaren Text bietet und nicht hauptsächlich aus Biographien und Aufzählungen von Büchertiteln besteht”; M.S. Khan, “*Ṭabaqāt al-umam* of Qāḍī Šā'id al-Andalusī”, *Indian Journal of History of Science* 30/2-4 (1995), pp. 133-49, here p. 133: “The *Ṭabaqāt al-Umam* by Qāḍī Šā'id al-Andalusī is a work of importance, being ‘the first world history of science’”; J. Samsó, *Las Ciencias de los Antiguos en al-Andalus*, Fundación Ibn Tufayl de Estudios Árabes, Almería 2011, p. 19: “una auténtica historia universal de la ciencia”.

(6) the Egyptians (*fi abl maṣr*); (7) the Arabs (*inda l-'arab*); (8) the Jews (*fi banī isrā'īl*). This sequence seems to correspond to a progression from East to West, combined with the desire to conclude the survey by focusing on the achievements of scholars still active on the soil of al-Andalus.<sup>2</sup> In the prologue to the work, the same eight nations appear in the same order, except that the Hebrews are there inserted between the Chaldaeans (whom they are said to derive from) and the Greeks.<sup>3</sup>

### *The seven primeval Nations*

The same prologue opens with the mention of a theory – already found in Mas'ūdī's *Tanbīh*<sup>4</sup> – according to which the ecumene (the inhabited quarter of the earth) originally consisted of seven primeval nations (*umam*). Šā'id introduces this doctrine in these words:

Those who have studied the history of the nations and thoroughly examined the epochs and the succession of eras sustain that in ancient times (*fi sālif al-duhūr*), before the subdivision into tribes and the separation of languages, there were seven nations.<sup>5</sup>

These seven primeval nations are then briefly described by the author, in the following succession: (1) 'Persians'; (2) 'Chaldaeans' (including Syrians, Babylonians, Armenians, Nabateans, and others); (3) 'Greeks, Romans, Franks, Galicians, Burjān, Slavs, Russians, and others'; (4) 'Copts' (including Egyptians, Abyssinians, Nubians, Berbers, and others); (5) a collection of 'Turkish tribes'; (6) 'peoples from Hind and Sind'; (7) 'peoples from Šīn'. For each of these seven nations (or rather groups of nations, as we can see), the author repeatedly insists that 'they spoke a unique language and formed a unique empire (*kānat luġatu hum wāḥida wa-mamlakatu hum wāḥida*)'.

The following Table (see Fig. 1) will help us to summarize the principal indications of the text regarding the geographic location and, when specified, the 'unique language' attributed to each of these groups.

<sup>2</sup> G. Martinez-Gros, "Classification des nations et classifications des sciences: trois exemples andalous du V<sup>e</sup>/XI<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Mélanges de la Casa Velázquez* 20 (1984), pp. 84-114, here pp. 87-8: "L'influence de la géographie des climats est encore sensible dans l'ordre de succession des Nations qui se sont intéressées aux sciences: Indiens, Perses, Chaldéens, Grecs, *Rūm*, Egyptiens, Arabes (d'Orient et d'Espagne), Juifs enfin. En gros, on le voit, la science va d'Est en Ouest, dans la zone centrale de la Terre, même si les irrégularités de cette progression attirent déjà l'attention. L'Arabie est à l'est de l'Egypte, de la Grèce, du *Rūm*, qui la précèdent pourtant sur notre liste. Mais les Arabes sont répartis en 'Orientaux' et 'Andalous' et ici, visiblement le point de vue andalou l'emporte. Plus gênante la place des Juifs, en dernière position, quand leur terre d'origine est la Syrie". See also: M.G. Balty-Guesdon, "Al-Andalus et l'héritage grec d'après les *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* de Šā'id al-Andalusī", in A. Hasnawī – A. Elamrani-Jamal – M. Aouad (eds.), *Perspectives arabes et médiévales sur la tradition et scientifique et philosophique grecque*. Actes du colloque de la SIHSPAI, Paris 31 mars - 3 avril 1993, Peeters, Paris - Leuven 1993, pp. 331-42, here p. 336: "Le second présupposé à l'œuvre dans les *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* est l'universalité des sciences, dans le passé et dans leur réalisation présente. Toutes les nations ont cultivé des parties d'un même ensemble, à des degrés divers. Aucun savoir n'est attribué à l'un ou à l'autre. Tous ces savoirs ont convergé vers l'Andalus".

<sup>3</sup> Abū l-Qāsim ibn Šā'id al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt*, ed. L. Cheikho, Beirut 1912 (reprinted in: *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-Umam par Abū l-Qāsim Ibn Šā'id al-Andalusī* (m. 462/1069-70), Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe University, Frankfurt a.M. 1999 [hereafter: Cheikho-Blachère]), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, ed. J.M. De Goeje, Brill, Leiden 1894 (*BGA*, VIII), pp. 77-85.

<sup>5</sup> *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 5 Cheikho-Blachère.

<i>Nations</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Language</i>
Persians	'at the centre of the ecumene': Zagros, Ṭabaristān, Khurasān, Kirmān, Sijistān, Fārs...	'Originally Persian (then Pahlavi, Zend, and other idioms')
Chaldaeans	'at the centre of the ecumene': Sawād, Jazīra, Syria, Arabia, Hijāz, Tihāma, Najd, Ḥaḍramawt, Yaman...	'Originally Syriac (then also Hebrew and Arabic)'
Greeks, Romans, Franks, Galicians, Burjān, Slavs, Russians	Black Sea, Sea of Azov, 'in the upper-North quarter of the ecumene'	'A unique language' ( <i>unspecified, but presumably Greek</i> )
Copts	Egypt, 'Peoples of the South', 'Peoples of the West, as far as the Atlantic Ocean'	'A unique language' ( <i>unspecified, but presumably Copt</i> )
Turks	<i>Unspecified</i>	'A unique language' ( <i>unspecified, but presumably Turk</i> )
Hind and Sind	India, Sind, and surroundings	'A unique language' ( <i>unspecified, but presumably Sanskrit</i> )
Šīn	China, Āmūr, and surroundings	'A unique language' ( <i>unspecified, but presumably Chinese</i> )

Fig. 1. The seven primeval nations in the *Ṭabaqāt al-umam*

In a previous article I have argued that this distribution of the seven primeval nations which we find in both Maṣ'ūdī and Šā'id (with only minor discrepancies between the two) has its roots in the theory of *kēšvar-s* (Arabic: *kišwār-s*) ultimately deriving from Sasanid Persia. This theory postulates that the world was originally made up of seven circular territories, six of which circumscribing the seventh – the region of the Īrānshār – at the centre of the representation. The manuscript tradition of Bīrūnī's *Ṭahdīd nihāyāt al-amākin*<sup>6</sup> preserves a typical example of this scheme, which takes the following aspect (see Fig. 2).

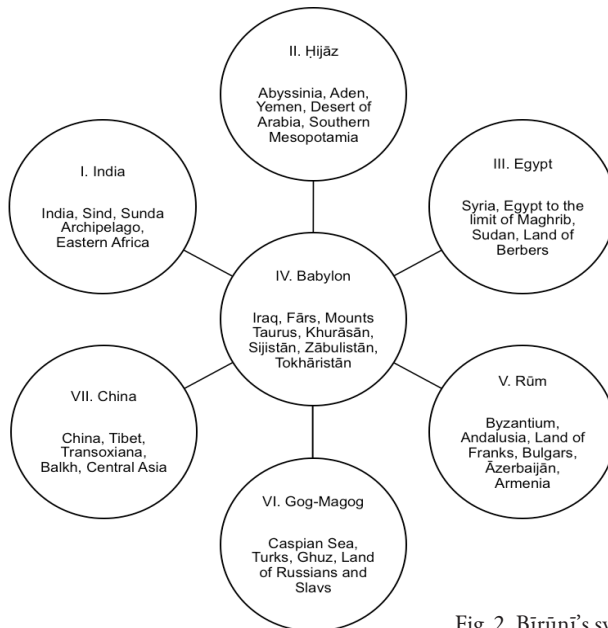


Fig. 2. Bīrūnī's system of *kišwār-s*

<sup>6</sup> See Al-Biruni, *The Determination of the Coordinates of Positions for the Correction of Distances between Cities*, ed. J. Ali, American Univ. of Beirut, Beirut 1967 (Centennial Publications), p. 101.

Early in Islamic geography, the Iranian *kišwār* theory was amalgamated with the Greek theory of climes, with its classical subdivision of the ecumene into seven horizontal bands aligned side-by-side in latitude in the Northern hemisphere. At some early stage, the *kišwār* theory was also given an astrological turn, with each of the circles being connected to a specific planet, as one infers for instance from a list of associations provided by Abū Mašar in his short treatise on ‘The Cities and their Climes, Signs, and Planets’.<sup>7</sup> This system can be visualised as follows (see Fig. 3):

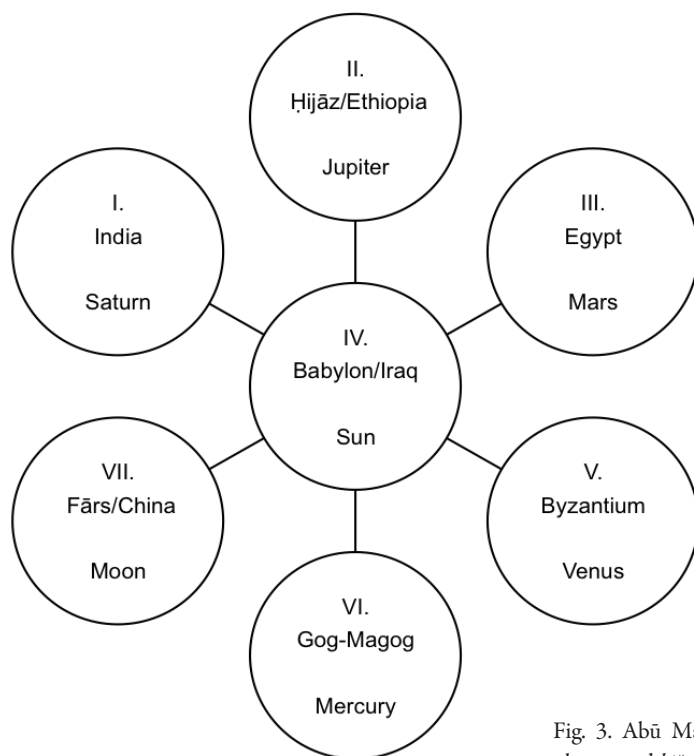


Fig. 3. Abū Mašar’s list of associations between planets and *kišwār*-s

Readers interested in the details of these associations and their astrological implications for Islamic geography and cosmology in the Middle Ages may refer to that other contribution.<sup>8</sup> What will retain us here is the remark on which Ša‘id concludes his review of the seven primeval nations, one of the few statements not found as such in Maš‘ūdī’s *Tanbih*. The text reads:

These seven nations together constituted the whole of mankind (*fa-hādīhi al-umam al-sab’a kānat muḥīta bi-ḡami’ al-bašar*). All of them were Šābi’ans, who worshipped idols representing the essences of the upper world and the individual spheres of the planets and the like (*wa-kānū ḡami’an šābi’a ya’budūn al-ašnām tamṭīlan bi al-ḡawābir al-’ulwiyya wa-l-ašḡāš al-falakiyya min al-kawākib al-sab’a wa-ḡayri hā*). These seven nations later split up, their languages divided, and their religions diverged

<sup>7</sup> See K. Yamamoto - Ch. Burnett (eds.), *Abū Mašar on Historical Astrology. The Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)*, Brill, Leiden - Boston - Köln 2000 (Islamic Philosophy Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, vol. 33-34), Vol. I, pp. 514-19.

<sup>8</sup> G. de Callatay, “*Kiṣwār*-s, planètes et rois du monde: le substrat iranien de la géographie arabe, à travers l’exemple des *Ikhwān al-Šafā’*”, in B. Broekaert - S. Van den Branden - J.J. Pérennès (eds.), *Perspectives on Islamic Culture, Essays in Honour of Emilio G. Platti*, Peeters, Leuven 2013 (Les Cahiers du MIDEO, 6), pp. 53-71.

from one another (*tumma iftaraqat hādīhi al-umam al-sab'a wa-taša'abat luġātu hā wa-tabāyanat adyānu hum*).<sup>9</sup>

This is the first time that 'the Šābi'ans' are mentioned in the treatise. What Šā'id reports here suggests that these people of a bygone age were primarily characterized by their obsessiveness with idolatry and astrology. It also leaves us with the impression that this belief in the essences of the upper world was understood as being their own particular form of religion. What is definitely noteworthy in the above lines is the affirmation that in those remote and original times the Šābi'ans 'constituted the whole of mankind'.

#### *The eight scientific Nations and the Šābi'ans*

In the rest of his work, while dealing with the eight nations that have since then demonstrated their scientific skills, we find that Šā'id has a lot more to say about 'the Šābi'ans'. Indeed, he mentions Šābi'ans in connection with nearly every one of the nations he has retained for his classification. In some cases, as we shall see, he refers to them as to savants of the past, but in other instances he unambiguously mentions them as his own contemporaries. The present paper will focus on all these passages. We shall try to determine where the author of the *Ṭabaqāt* situates these groups of Šābi'ans in the overall history of the nations, and we shall ask ourselves to what extent these groups may be regarded as continuators or remnants of the primordial Šābi'ans.

Before we turn to these passages, we need first to highlight the structural similarities and dissimilarities between the two sequences of nations described by Šā'id, namely the seven primordial races on the one hand, and on the other the eight scientific nations (see Fig. 4).

Primeval Races	Scientific Nations
Persians	Indians
Chaldaeans	Persians
Greeks, Romans, etc.	Chaldaeans
Copts	Greeks
Turks	Romans
Indians	Egyptians
Chinese	Arabs
	Jews

Fig. 4. The seven primeval Races and the eight scientific Nations

The two lists agree with one another in defining as individual groups the Persians, the Indians, and the Egyptians (although these latter are named Copts in the second list). They also converge in the inclusion of the Greeks and the Romans, but whereas the sevenfold list gathers them together, with other nations, as a group of its own, the two are treated separately in the eightfold structure. Likewise, the Arabs and the Jews, who are part and parcel of the Chaldaeian group in the first sequence, now receive each their own chapter in the second. As for the Chinese and the Turks, two of the seven primeval races, they do not appear in the other list for not being regarded as scientific nations, as we have seen.

<sup>9</sup> *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 7 Cheikho-Blachère.

## Indians

The first category of Ṣābi'ans we come across in line with a 'scientific nation' are the "Indian Ṣābi'ans", which Ṣā'id mentions in Chapter 1 as one of the two groups constituting the country's population:

As for the divine science, they [the Indians] all agree that God – How powerful and exalted is He! – is unique and that there cannot be anything associated with Him, yet they disagree about the other issues regarding Him. Some of them are Brahmanists, and others are Ṣābi'ans. The Brahmanists form a group not large in number but claiming a noble extraction. Some of them sustain that the world was generated and some that it is eternal, yet they all agree that prophecies are vain, that it is forbidden to slaughter animals and to make them suffer. As for the Ṣābi'ans, who are a multitude and form the majority of the Indians, they affirm that the world is eternal, and that the cause of its existence is no other than the Creator – How powerful and exalted is He ! They attach great significance to the stars. They represent them with images in their likeness and seek to make them propitious through various operations in line with what they know of the nature of each one of these stars. [This they do] in order to attract the faculties of these stars and to direct these faculties on this world, in agreement with the dispositions of these stars and with their own choices (*Tabaqāt*, p. 12 Cheikho-Blachère).

As can be seen, Ṣā'id seems to consider the Ṣābi'ans of India as genuine followers of the primeval Ṣābi'ans, highlighting here again the penchant for astrology and astral magic yet reporting in addition their belief in the eternity of the world. What makes Ṣā'id's testimony particularly revealing is, of course, the assumption that these Indian Ṣābi'ans form the majority of the country's population in his own time. In the rest of the chapter, Ṣā'id confesses his relative unfamiliarity with Indian science, but still stresses the Indians' expertise and know-how in various disciplines, such as mathematics, music, or chess-playing. The science of the heavens again receives prime of place in this enumeration, with a detailed account of Sindhind, Arjabhar and Arkand, the three principal systems of classical Indian cosmology as they were known to Abū Ma'shar and many others in medieval Islam. These systems are three variants of a theory positing that the history of the universe consists in the indefinite succession of gigantic cycles determined by the return into conjunction of the seven planets with the starry sphere in the first degree of Aries. These systems vary from one another as to the length of this universal Great Year – namely, 4,320,000,000 years for the Sindhind, 4,320,000 years for the Arjabhar, and 360,000 years for the Arkand –, but they all agree in establishing the year -3,101 of the Common Era as the moment when the last great conjunction took place, coinciding with the great Flood and announcing the current cycle.<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, Ṣā'id also mentions by his name one Indian astronomer, i.e. Kanka. Although this is not said as such, we have the best reasons to assume that the *qādī* of Toledo attributed all these achievements of Indian astronomy to the 'Ṣābi'ans', rather than to the Brahmans.

All these are interesting data to be recalled here, especially when one considers the leading role that Ṣā'id is known to have played as part of the team of astronomers who were responsible for the construction of the illustrious 'Toledan Tables', lost in the Arabic original but still extant in a rich

---

<sup>10</sup> See for instance D. Pingree, *The Thousands of Abū Ma'shar*, The Warburg Institute, London 1968, pp. 28-29. On the doctrine of the Great Year, see G. de Callatāy, *Annus Platonicus. A Study of World Years in Greek, Latin and Arabic Sources*, Peeters, Louvain - Paris 1996; G. de Callatāy, "Eternity and World Cycles", in Y. Melamed (ed.), *Eternity*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2016, pp. 64-69.



and widely-ramified Latin tradition.<sup>11</sup> As has been established for long in modern scholarship, the 'Sindhind' Indo-Iranian tradition left a considerable imprint on these tables, which were to remain unsurpassed in al-Andalus until the time of King Alfonso X El Sabio and the 'Alphonsine Tables' in the thirteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

### Persians

Chapter 2, on the Persians, also includes a passage on 'Šābi'ans', who in this case are manifestly referred to as a group of a bygone epoch. The text reads:

Some historians have reported that all Persians were originally monotheists who followed the religion of Noah (*fī awwal amri-hā kānat muwahhida 'alā dīn nūh*) – Peace be upon him! – until Budhāsaf the Oriental brought to Ṭahmūrath, the third king of Persia, the doctrine of the Ḥanīf-s, that is, of the Šābi'ans (*madhab al-hunafā' wa hum al-šābi'yyūn*). Having converted to that doctrine, Ṭahmūrath imposed it at once on the Persians, and they believed in it for about 1,800 years, until they all converted to Mazdaism (*fa-taqadū hu nahwa alfsana wa-tamānīmī'a sana tamaḡḡasū ḡami'an*).<sup>13</sup>

Together with that on the Arabs, the chapter on the Persians is, in spite of its brevity, the only one where the chronology of the nation under consideration is presented fully and seamlessly, as was once noted by Gabriel Martinez-Gros in a study of the 'implicit conception of history' at stake in the *Ṭabaqāt*.<sup>14</sup> From the passage above, we infer that in this history Persian Šābi'anism was introduced from the Orient at the time of King Ṭahmūrath. We find the same story, or a close variant of it, in a great variety of Arabic sources dealing with the 'Sumaniyya', in other words the Buddhists.<sup>15</sup> These sources would seem to suggest that, as a result of a series of amalgamations and deformations, the 'Buddhism' as practiced by these 'Sumaniyya' had for some historians of the Islamic Middle Ages

<sup>11</sup> G.J. Toomer, "A Survey of the *Toledan Tables*", *Osiris* 15 (1968), pp. 5-174; F.S. Pedersen, *The Toledan Tables. A Review of the Manuscripts and the Textual Versions with an Edition*, Commission Agent Reitzels Forlag, Copenhagen 2002, in four volumes.

<sup>12</sup> On all this, see M.S. Khan, "Qāḍī Šā'id's Account of Medieval Arab Astronomy", *Islamic Culture*, s.n. (July 1980), pp. 153-62; L. Richter-Bernburg, "Šā'id, the Toledan Sciences and Andalusī Science", in D. King - G. Saliba (eds.), *From Deferent to Equant: A Volume of Studies in the History of Science in the Ancient and Medieval Near East in Honor of E.S. Kennedy*, Academy of Sciences, New York 1987, pp. 373-402; E. Llaveró Ruiz, "El cadi Šā'id de Toledo, primer historiador de la filosofía y de las ciencias en el mundo árabe", *Anales Toledanos*, 24 (1987), pp. 7-29, here pp. 12-15; L. Richter-Bernburg, "Šā'id al-Andalusī: Abū al-Qāsim Šā'id ibn Abī al-Walīd Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Šā'id al-Taḡhlībī al-Qurṭubī", in Th. Hockey et al. (ed.), *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, Springer, New York 2007, pp. 1005-6; Samsó, *Las Ciencias de los Antiguos* (above, n. 1), pp. 144-52 (pp. 481-4).

<sup>13</sup> *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 17 Cheikho-Blachère.

<sup>14</sup> G. Martinez-Gros, "La clôture du temps chez le cadi Šā'id: une conception implicite de l'histoire", *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 40 (1985), pp. 147-53, here p. 149: "Des six peuples – Arabes mis à part – dont l'auteur nous parle (Indiens, Perses, Chaldéens, Grecs, Rūm, Égyptiens), les Perses sont les seuls dont l'Histoire, ininterrompue, s'étende du Déluge à l'Islam: 3164 ans vécus sous cinq dynasties, celles de Kayūmārt, Mīnūshihr, Kaykubad, des Diadoques (531 ans) et des Sassanides (433 ans). C'est le pouvoir royal qui donne ici la mesure du temps".

<sup>15</sup> D. Gimaret, "Bouddha et les bouddhistes dans la tradition musulmane", *Journal Asiatique* 257 (1969), pp. 273-316, here p. 279: "Cependant, pour la plupart des historiens, Būdhāsf serait un faux prophète, apparu en Inde au début du règne de Ṭahmūrāth, petit-fils de Gayōmart et troisième roi des Perses, et qui aurait prêché la religion des Sabéens. Telle est la tradition que rapportent al-Ṭabarī, puis al-Mas'ūdī, al-Maqdisī, Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, al-Bīrūnī. Selon al-Mas'ūdī, Būdhāsf se serait rendu de l'Inde dans le Sind, et aurait parcouru le Kirmān. Il serait même allé jusque dans le Fārs, où les Perses auraient pratiqué sa religion jusqu'à l'apparition de Zoroastre".

become nothing more than a reference to the paganism of ancient Persia, as was observed by the late Patricia Crone.<sup>16</sup>

A few lines further on in the same chapter, Šā'id specifies that after this 1,800-year long period the Persians 'rejected Šābi'anism' (*rafaḍū dīn al-šābi'a*), and that "they believed in Zoroaster as a prophet sent from God" (*i'taqadū zarādušt nabīyyan mursalan min 'indi allāh*) for about 1,300 years before Persia was ultimately crushed by Islam at the time of caliphs 'Umar and 'Uṣmān. In addition to praising the Persians for their particular skills in both medicine and astrology, Šā'id also mentions in this chapter the 360,000-year conjunctive Great Year – a period which the Persians derived from India, but which had been traditionally referred to in medieval Islam since Abū Ma'shar as 'the Cycle of the Persians'.<sup>17</sup> The mention of this period in this context deserves some consideration. According to 'Alī b. 'Abdallāh al-Qasrī, the author of a *Kitāb al-Qirānāt* (*Book of Conjunctions*) preserved in part in al-Maqdisī's *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-l-Tārīḥ* (*Book of Creation and History*), the science of the 360,000-year cycle remained the prerogative of 'Būdhāsaf the philosopher, from the ancient nation of Babylon (*Būdāsaf al-faylasūf min ahl bābāl al-'atīqa*).<sup>18</sup> This said, it remains unclear which role in particular Šā'id attributes to the 'Persian Šābi'ans' in this scientific evolution.

### Chaldaeans

Chapter 3, on the Chaldaeans, is the shortest of the *Ṭabaqāt*. It does not include any explicit mention of the Šābi'ans, but it stresses the Chaldaeans' familiarity with both astrology and talismans in a way that surpasses everything of that sort for any of the other nations:

The Chaldaeans developed the scientific observation of the stars and were experts in the science of the secrets of the sphere. They were famous for their familiarity with the natures and decrees of the stars, and with the properties and powers of the generated beings. To the peoples of the other side of the ecumene they transmitted the way to design temples in order to attract the powers of the stars, to reveal their natures and to cast their rays upon these temples by way of various offerings and special operations. Wonderful deeds and astonishing results were obtained by them in the establishment of talismans and other types of magic.<sup>19</sup>

The influence of 'Babylonian-Chaldaean' magic upon Andalusī scholars prior to Šā'id's time has long been acknowledged. Suffice it to mention the *Gāyat al-ḥakīm* (*Picatrix*), the most famous treatise of astral magic ever written in Arabic, which was compiled by Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī around the middle of the tenth century.<sup>20</sup> But let us turn back to the *Ṭabaqāt*. As the most savant of the Chaldaeans Šā'id

<sup>16</sup> P. Crone, *The Iranian Reception of Islam: the Non-Traditional Strands* (*Collected Studies* in Three Volumes, edited by Hanna Siurua), vol. 2, Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2016, pp. 209-32 ('Buddhism as ancient Iranian paganism'). Crone's study is primarily focused on Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī and Ḥwārizmī.

<sup>17</sup> de Callataÿ, *Annus Platonicus* (above, n. 10), p. 134: "As for the expression 'Cycle of the Persians', there cannot be any doubt that it refers, not to this allegedly flourishing period in the development of Sasanian astronomy, but to the kings and heroes, like Hūshank or Ṭahmūrath, whose mythical lives had been related to the story of the famous flood: in his introduction to *The Thousands* of Abū Ma'shar, Pingree cites texts from Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Hāshimī and al-Bīrūnī that are clear confirmation of this".

<sup>18</sup> Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-l-Tārīḥ*, ed. C. Huart as *Le Livre de la création et de l'histoire d'Abou-Zēid Aḥmed ben Sabl el-Balkhī* publié et traduit par C. Huart d'après le manuscrit de Constantinople, 6 vols, Ernest Leroux, Paris 1899-1919, here Vol. 2, p. 97.

<sup>19</sup> *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 18 Cheikho-Blachère.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance: D. Pingree, "Some of the Sources of the *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm*", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld*

cites Hermes the Babylonian, whom he makes a contemporary of Socrates, but he relies on Abū Mašar to say that long before this Hermes and others in recent times, “there was the Hermes who lived before the Flood, whom the Jews identify with the prophet Henoch, and who is the same as Idrīs – Peace be upon him! (*al-Hirmis alladī kāna qabla al-tūfān alladī yaz'amu al-ibrāniyyūn anna-hu ḥanūḥ al-nabiyy wa-huwa Idrīs 'alay-hi al-salām*)”.<sup>21</sup> Amongst the savants who came after to Hermes the Babylonian, and therefore after the Flood, Šā'id mentions an astrologer by the name of Wālīs, whom we may identify with confidence with Vettius Valens, in spite of the fact that the text shows signs of corruption here. Curiously enough, Šā'id appears to be hesitant as to what nation Vettius should belong to. As shall be seen, the same savant is also mentioned amongst the Egyptian scholars in the corresponding chapter. From a statement to be found there it clearly follows that Šā'id regarded him as a Šābi'an as well. In fact, it is most likely that Šā'id considered all post-deluvian Babylonian savants as Šābi'ans.

### Greeks

Turning to the Greeks in Chapter 4 (not surprisingly one of the longest chapters of the *Ṭabaqāt*), we come across various mentions of the Šābi'ans, the first of which almost from the outset of Šā'id's account. Thus, just after having recalled Greece's location on the surface of the earth and praised the nation for being that of Alexander the Great, the author declares straight off:

The Greeks were a community of Šābi'ans, who attached great significance to the stars and worshipped idols (*wa-kānat 'umma al-yunāniyyīn sābi'a mu'azzima li-l-kawākib dā'ina bi-'ibādat al-aṣnām*). Their savants were called *fālāsifa* – in the singular, *faylasūf* – a name that means ‘lover of wisdom’ in the Greek language.<sup>22</sup>

If need be, this passage would confirm that Šā'id uses ‘Šābi'ans’ in a very broad sense. There cannot be any doubt, for instance, that he would have called Šābi'ans the five savants he retains as the major figures in Greek philosophy, namely (and in this order) Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

One also comes across Pythagoras, or rather the Pythagorean school, in the second passage of Chapter 4 in which Šābi'ans are mentioned:

The first [Greek] philosophers busied themselves with prime natural philosophy (*al-falsafa al-ṭabi'iyya al-ūlā*), a field into which the school of Pythagoras (*šī'a fit-āgūrus*), Thales of Miletus and the Greek

---

*Institutes* 43 (1980), pp. 1-15, here p. 3: “The *Ghāya* itself proclaims that the Nabataean Chaldaeans, the Egyptian Copts, the Nabataean Syrians, the Abyssinians, the Kurds, the Indians and the Persians each have knowledge of different kinds of magic, and in fact it has drawn, whether wittingly or not, upon materials derived from most of these cultures. In another passage the *Ghāya* less correctly names as the three main sources of its magic the Šābi'ans (by which are here intended the Nabataeans), the Greeks and the Indians, and ascribes to them respectively the methods of making talismans, of praying to the planets and of using magical characters and words”. See also D. Pingree, “Al-Ṭabarī on the Prayers to the Planets”, *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 44 (1992), pp. 105-17. On Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī as author of the *Ghāya*, see M. Fierro, “Bāṭinism in al-Andalus. Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), author of the *Rubāt al-Ḥakīm* and the *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm (Picatrix)*”, *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996), pp. 87-112; G. de Callatāy, “Magia en al-Andalus: *Rasā'il Ijwān al-Šafā*”, *Rubāt al-Ḥakīm y Gāyat al-Ḥakīm (Picatrix)*”, *Al-Qantara* 34.2 (2013), pp. 297-343.

<sup>21</sup> *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 18 Cheikho-Blachère. Pingree, *The Thousands of Abū Ma'shar* (above, n. 10), pp. 13-18; C. Burnett, “The Legend of the Three Hermes and Abū Ma'shar's *Kitāb al-ulūf* in the Latin Middle Ages”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976), pp. 231-4; K. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes. From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Sciences*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2009, pp. 121-63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 20 Cheikho-Blachère.

and Egyptian communities of Šābi'ans (*'awāmm al-šābi'a min al-yunāniyyīn wa-l-maṣriyyīn*) have specialized.<sup>23</sup>

We may infer from the previous quotation that Šā'id in fact regarded as Šābi'ans all the savants he lists in the rest of this chapter without exception. Whether philosophers in the broad sense of the word, such as the 'big five' mentioned above, or representatives of more specific disciplines, such as Ptolemy, Euclides, Galen or Archimedes, these scholars all posited a link of dependency and causality between the supra-lunar world and the world of coming-to-be and passing-away.

The third explicit mention of the Šābi'ans in this chapter concerns in reality one of the "modern followers" (*min al-tā'hirīn*) of Pythagoras and ancient natural philosophy. He is Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyā' al-Rāzī (the Rhazes of the Latin Middle Ages), the Persian physician and philosopher who died in 925 CE. Šā'id portrays Rāzī as a man who detested Aristotle and criticized him for having corrupted philosophy. As examples of this anti-Aristotelian position, which he himself condemns, Šā'id mentions Rāzī's works on metaphysics, on spiritual medicine, as well as his:

other works showing his preference for the doctrine of the Dualists about associationism (*al-išrāk*), for the views of the Brahmans regarding the vanity of prophecy (*ibtāl al-nubuwwa*), and for the belief of all the Šābi'ans in the transmigration [of souls] (*al-tanāsuh*).<sup>24</sup>

This is the first time in the *Tābaqāt* that we come across the notion of *tanāsuh al-arwāh* ('transmigration of souls') in line with the Šābi'ans. Having referred in the same passage to the Brahmans for their rejection of prophecy, Šā'id is, in all likelihood, still having India in mind when he refers to the Šābi'ans. In the already mentioned 'Book of Creation and History', al-Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī provides a detailed and remarkable account of the doctrine of the transmission of souls as professed by the 'Sumaniyya'.<sup>25</sup> As has been said above, there is little doubt that it is to these Buddhists that Šā'id is referring when he mentions the 'Šābi'ans' in his chapter about India. What this last passage on the transmigration of souls confirms in any case is the universalist approach which Šā'id takes whenever it comes to the Šābi'an issue. It is becoming patent that bridges must be built between all these passages on 'Šābi'ans', irrespective of the chapters in which they are found.

### Romans

Chapter 5 will provide us with another clear piece of evidence of this. Having dealt with the Greeks in the previous chapter, Šā'id now turns to the Romans, which necessarily implies some words to account for the period of history shared by these two civilisations. The first three passages mentioning the Šābi'ans in this chapter all reflect this problem. The first one reads:

<sup>23</sup> *Tābaqāt*, ed. Cheikho-Blachère, pp. 32-33. This statement is reminiscent of others in Arabic literature. In one of the two versions of *Epistle 32* ('On the Intellectual Principles According to the View of Pythagoras') that has come down to us from the corpus of *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Šafā'*, we find for instance the assumption that "Pythagoras was a monotheist sage, from the people of Ḥarrān in Syria (*Fī ṭāgūrus kāna ra'ḡulan ḥakīman muwahḥīdan min abl ḥarrān min al-šām*)"; see *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Šafā'*, 32b, ed. P.E. Walker, in P.E. Walker - I.K. Poonawala - D. Simonovitz - G. de Callatay (eds.), *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity, Sciences of the Soul and Intellect Part I. An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 32-36*, Oxford U.P. in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, Oxford 2015, p. 17 of the Arabic edition.

<sup>24</sup> *Tābaqāt*, p. 33 Cheikho-Blachère.

<sup>25</sup> Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-l-Ta'riḥ*, Vol. 1, pp. 197-199 Huart (Arabic edition).

The city of Rome (*madīna rūmiyya*) became the capital of these two kingdoms [= the Roman and the Greek worlds] and remained so for 335 years, until Constantine, the son of Helena, adopted the religion of the Messiah, rejected the religion of the Šābi'ans (*rafāḍa dīn al-sābi'a*) and built on the gulf [= the Bosphorus] a city linked with his name called Constantinople, in the centre of the Greek world (*fi wasat bilād al-yunāniyyīn*).<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, we read a few lines further that:

In ancient times, the Romans were Šābi'ans (*wa-kāna al-rūm qadīman šābi'a*), until Constantine, the son of Helena and the founder of Constantinople, adopted the religion of the Christians and prompted the Romans to convert to it.<sup>27</sup>

The third passage is more informative as it deals with Šābi'ans that were still active in Muslim times:

During the dominion of the 'Abbāsids, under Muslim sovereignty (*fi dawla al-'abbāsiyya min mulūk al-islām*), a number of Christians and Šābi'ans were savants in the various sciences (*ḡamā'a min al-našārā wa-l-šābi'a 'ulamā' bi-funūn al-'ilm*). I do not know whether they were Greeks or Romans, or from another neighbouring nation.<sup>28</sup>

It is evidently not the purpose of this paper to re-enter into the many problems raised by medieval sources regarding the identification of these survivors of Šābi'anism within Islam, let alone to discuss the notoriously tricky issue of the role they may have played in the transmission of sciences.<sup>29</sup> As can

<sup>26</sup> *Tabaqāt*, p. 34 Cheikho-Blachère.

<sup>27</sup> *Tabaqāt*, p. 35 Cheikho-Blachère.

<sup>28</sup> *Tabaqāt*, p. 36 Cheikho-Blachère.

<sup>29</sup> Since Chwolsohn's pioneering and emblematic essay in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (D. Chwolsohn, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, 2 vols, Saint Petersburg, 1856; reprinted Oriental Press, Amsterdam 1965), the subject has generated an immense literature. Let us only mention here: J. Hjärpe, *Analyse critique des traditions arabes sur les Sabéens harraniens*, Ph.D Thesis, Uppsala, 1972; J.D. McAuliffe, "Exegetical Identification of the Šābi'ūn", *The Muslim World* 72 (1982), pp. 95-106; C. Buck, "The Identity of the Šābi'ūn: An Historical Quest", *The Muslim World* 74 (1984), pp. 172-86; M. Tardieu, "Šābiens coraniques et 'Šābiens' de Ḥarrān", *Journal Asiatique* 274 (1986), pp. 1-44; Id., "Les calendriers en usage à Ḥarrān d'après les sources arabes et le commentaire de Simplicius à la *Physique* d'Aristote", in I. Hadot (éd.), *Simplicius. Sa vie, son œuvre, sa survie*, W. de Gruyter, Berlin - New York 1987, pp. 40-57; T. Green, *The City of the Moon-God: Religious Traditions of Harran*, Brill, Leiden 1992; F.E. Peters, "Hermes and Harran: The Roots of Arabic-Islamic Occultism", in M. Mazzaoui - V.B. Moreen (eds.), *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City 1990, pp. 185-215; J. Lameer, "From Alexandria to Baghdad: Reflections on the Genesis of a Problematical Tradition", in G. Endress - R. Kruk (eds.), *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism. Studies On the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences dedicated to H.J. Drossaart Lulofs On His Ninetieth Birthday*, Research School CNWS, Leiden 1997 (CNWS Publications, 50), pp. 181-91; C. Genequand, "Idolâtrie, astrolâtrie et sabéisme", *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999), pp. 109-28; D. Pingree, "The Šābi'ans of Ḥarrān and the Classical Tradition", *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9 (2002), pp. 8-35; J. Hämeen-Anttila, "Continuity of Pagan Religious Traditions in Tenth-Century Iraq", in A. Panaino - G. Pettinato (eds.), *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena. Melammu Symposia III*, Mimesis, Bologna 2002 (International Association for Intercultural Studies of the MELAMMU Project), pp. 89-107; Van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes* (above, n. 21), pp. 64-114; D. De Smet, "Le Platon arabe et les Sabéens de Ḥarrān. La 'voie diffuse' de la transmission du platonisme en terre d'Islam", *Res Antiquae* 7 (2010), pp. 73-86; A. Caiozzo, "Éléments de rituels imagés dans les manuscrits de l'Orient médiéval", in J.-P. Boudet - A. Caiozzo - N. Weill-Parot (eds.), *Picatrix: Image et Magie. Actes du colloque international de Paris des 11 et 12 mai 2007*, Honoré Champion, Paris, 2011, pp. 57-75. See also A. Fratini - C. Prato, "I Sebōmenoi (tòn Theòn): una risposta all'antico enigma dei Sabei" [<http://www.ricerchefilosofiche.it/> (accessed 18 August, 2017)].

be seen, Šā'id admits that he possesses only some vague notions in these respects. In the same chapter, he does however mention by name one of these later Šābi'an scholars:

Amongst the Šābi'ans there was Abū-l-Ḥasan Tābit b. Qurra al-Ḥarrānī, a philosopher who mastered the sciences, who was well-versed in the various branches of wisdom, and who was able to understand the books on philosophy. He is the author of good works on logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, among other disciplines. He was a contemporary of Ya'qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī and Quṣṭā b. Lūqā.<sup>30</sup>

From the above statements about Roman Šābi'ans we may conclude that, in Šā'id's view, a fraction of the primeval Šābi'ans, of those who lived at the time of Romulus and Augustus, managed to survive the emergence of both Christianity and Islam in the subsequent periods of history. In contrast with what he says of the Šābi'ans of India, the author of the *Ṭabaqāt* does not refer to these survivors of Šābi'anism as his own contemporaries. They were active in 'Abbāsīd times, but seem to have disappeared not long after the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn, and in any case in the first half of the tenth century.

### *Egyptians*

Chapter 6, on the Egyptians, includes one mention of the Šābi'ans:

In ancient times the people of Egypt were Šābi'ans. They worshipped idols and managed temples. Later on, they converted to Christianity when it emerged, and this lasted until the triumph of the Muslims over that religion. Some of them converted to Islam, but the rest remained faithful, as *ḍimmī*-s, to their religion, until the present day.<sup>31</sup>

In agreement with the theory of the seven primeval nations, we are told that Šābi'anism was the original religion of Egypt, here again before the appearance of Christianity and then Islam. In this case, however, it does not seem that Šābi'ans survived these new religions. Regarding Egypt, Šā'id has more to tell us about the very early and mythical times. We thus find once again the mention of the Flood and of the first Hermes whom the Jews identify with Henoch and the Muslims with Idrīs. The story is this time given in greater detail. The pre-deluvian Hermes is here said to be the first to have been informed of the spiritual beings of the heavenly spheres, the first to have erected temples, and the inventor of medicine. He is also reported as the first to have predicted the Flood and as the sage who, in order to prevent human arts and sciences from disappearing in the cataclysm, built the pyramids as sanctuaries for these sciences. It appears that Šā'id's report of the three Hermes is fundamentally the same as that of Abū Ma'shar, yet with some rearrangement of the structure in order to better correspond to the design of the *Ṭabaqāt*.<sup>32</sup>

Immediately after these lines is found the statement that, after the Flood, there were in Egypt savants versed in various branches of philosophy, especially those concerned with talismans, incantations, alchemy and the like. Amongst the post-deluvian savants we find again the second

<sup>30</sup> *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 37 Cheikho-Blachère.

<sup>31</sup> *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 38 Cheikho-Blachère.

<sup>32</sup> Van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes* (above, n. 21), p. 130: "It can be seen from the other relations of the legend that Šā'id al-Andalusī has presented a heavily edited version of the passages on the Hermes from the *Thousands* of Abū Ma'shar, arranged to fit his program of giving the history of science in order by nation. Therefore the first Hermes appears in the section on Egypt, the second, Babylonian, Hermes is in the section on the Chaldaean nation, and the third (whom he calls the second) is again in the section on Egypt".

Hermes, but also scholars such as Proclus, Theon of Alexandria and Vettius Valens – a sure indication that Šā'id is here again referring to the people he views as Šābi'ans.

### Arabs

Chapter 7, the longest of the *Ṭabaqāt*, is the one devoted to the Arabs. As is well known, Šā'id's report proves relatively unexceptional in the section concerned with the Eastern Arabs but offers much valuable first-hand information in the part focused on al-Andalus. This said, the beginning of the chapter provides us with another kind of dichotomy. What we are told indeed is that there are in fact two groups of Arabs to be considered, one extinct and the other still in existence (*fāmin hum firqatān firqa bā'ida wa firqa bāqiyya*). To the first pertain ancient peoples such as the 'Ād, the Ṭamūd, and the like, about whose glory nothing can be ascertained since time has for long annihilated them and their achievements. As to the surviving Arabs, they are said themselves to be divided into two branches, the Qaḥṭān and the 'Adnān, which both left their imprint on history first during the Ġāhiliyya and then under Islam. Of the various tribes which were famous at the time of the Ġāhiliyya (the Ḥimyar and their Tubba' descendants, the Kinda, and the like), Šā'id mentions their passion for astrology, to which those monarchs had recourse for most aspects of their lives and which sharply contrasts with their total disregard for observational astronomy and for the rest of the rational sciences. In terms of beliefs, Šā'id also mentions the multiple cults that these ancient tribes rendered to such or such planet, to such or such star, to such or such idol, as well as the presence of Christian, Jewish or Manichaean elements in this pre-Islamic context. It is at this stage of the report that we come across a new mention of the Šābi'ans:

All the Arabs that worshipped idols professed the uniqueness of God Most-High. Their worship for idols was nothing but a form of the religion of the Šābi'ans (*wa-innamā kānat 'ibādātu hum la hā ḍarban min al-tadayyun bi-dīn al-šābi'a*), who attached great significance to the stars and to the ways to represent them in temples. This has nothing to do with what is assumed by those who ignore the religions of the nations and the views of the sects. Regarding the worshipping of idols these people consider these idols to be divinities that have created the world – an assumption that no one endowed with thought and reasoning could ever sustain or admit in any way. The proof of this is this verse of God Most-High: 'We only worship them that they may bring us nearer to Allāh in position' (Qu. 39:3).<sup>33</sup>

It is certainly striking to find under Šā'id's pen that there were Arab Šābi'ans at the time of the Ġāhiliyya, and that these people should in no way be assimilated to polytheists. On the contrary, the present text rather seems to suggest that belief in the uniqueness of God is one of the necessary conditions to be a Šābi'an, something not found in the passages from the *Ṭabaqāt* mentioned thus far.

Before he turns his attention to the savants of Islam, Šā'id adds important data of comparative chronology regarding the pre-Islamic period. He situates the destruction of the dam of Ma'rib, in Yemen, 2,060 solar years after the Flood, and says that this time coincided with the reigns of the Ḥimyarite Šammir Yar'aš, of the Jewish David, and of the Persian Kayḥusraw III. The destruction of the Ma'rib dam is generally dated to a few centuries before the rise of Islam. It is not clear, however, whether Šā'id assumed that Šābi'ans were still active in Arabia after this date, although it is more likely that he did.

<sup>33</sup> *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 44 Cheikho-Blachère.

There is another mention of Šābi'ans in this chapter, but it occurs much later and does not in fact concern the Arabs. It takes place in a discussion over the epoch that preceded the Arab-Muslim conquests of al-Andalus. The text reads:

As for the religion of the people in al-Andalus, it was originally the religion of the Šābi'an Romans, then it was Christianity until the triumph of the Muslims in the period mentioned above.<sup>34</sup>

### *Jews*

It is to the Jews that Šā'id devotes the last chapter of his *Ṭabaqāt*, one of the only sections of the book with no mention of the Šābi'ans. As stated above, the overall impression is that Šā'id wrote this ultimate chapter as a kind of appendix to his previous section on the Arabs of al-Andalus, a method which allowed him to conclude his work by focusing on what he knew best, that is, the scientific achievements of the mankind in his own country. This short and quite peculiar chapter<sup>35</sup> opens with the assertion that the Jews did not care about philosophy but only busied themselves with the Law and with prophetic biographies. It includes the statement that Israel was the cradle of prophecy and that most of the prophets were actually Jews. Šā'id also tells us that the Jewish people, originally located in Syria (*bilād al-Šām*), were forced to migrate to such an extent that they are now found in all parts of the world, with the notable exception of Arabia which they were forced to leave under the caliphate of 'Umar. Resulting from their contacts here and there with other nations, some Jews in the Near East, in Ifrīqiyā but more especially in al-Andalus managed to become experts in the rational sciences, particularly medicine, philosophy and astrology. The text mentions a few of these authorities, such as his contemporary Abū l-Faḍl Ḥašdāy b. Yūsuf b. Ḥašdāy, a scholar for whom Šā'id obviously shows great respect and who was already mentioned in the previous chapter, on the Arabs.<sup>36</sup> Still, Šā'id also makes it clear at the end of this chapter that these rationalists were always in the minority in comparison with the Jewish scholars who delved into religious matters. At the convergence of religious and scientific preoccupations, there is, however, one invention from the Banū Isrā'īl that Šā'id mentions with particular admiration. This is the calendar, a sophisticated system which enabled the Jews to date with accuracy every event since the birth of Adam, the father of all humans. Faithful to his habit of putting in relation with one another the different chronologies at his disposal, Šā'id notes that the 4,867<sup>th</sup> year of the Jewish calendar coincided with the year 458 of the Hegira (or 1006 CE).

### *A Tentative Reconstruction of Šā'id's Chronology of Nations*

Now that all statements about the Šābi'ans in the *Ṭabaqāt* have been cited, and given the abundance of such chronological parallels within the work, we may tentatively propose a reconstruction of Šā'id's chronology of nations in the form of a synthetic table (see fig. 5). For each of the eight scientific nations, the elements deemed relevant to the discussion are distributed over the following four columns: 1) 'pre-deluvian times'; 2) 'Šābi'anism'; 3) intermediary period; 4) current age.

<sup>34</sup> *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 62 Cheikho-Blachère.

<sup>35</sup> A brief study of this chapter can be found in J. Finkel, "An Eleventh Century Source for the History of Jewish Scientists in Mohammedan Lands", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, 18 (1927-1928), pp. 45-54.

<sup>36</sup> On the particular relevance of this scholar to the *Ṭabaqāt*, see Balty-Guesdon, "Al-Andalus et l'héritage grec" (above, n. 2), pp. 336-7.



Nations	Pre-deluvian times	Šābi'anism	Intermediary period	Current age
Indians	Sindhind = 4,320,000,000 years Arjabhar = 4,320,000 years Sindhind = 360,000 years	Brahmanism <b>Šābi'ans (= Buddhists)</b> Kanka	Brahmanism → <b>Current Šābi'ans</b>	
Persians	'Cycle of the Persians' = 360,000 years	Noah's religion <b>Kāyūmarth (1<sup>st</sup> king)</b> <b>Tahmūrath (3<sup>rd</sup> king)</b> <b>Budhāsaf the Oriental</b> <b>Šābi'anism lasting for 1,800 years</b>	Zoroaster  Zoroastrianism	Islam
Chaldaeans	Pre-deluvian Hermes (= Henoch = Idrīs)	Nimrūd, builder of Babel Tower <b>Hermes the Babylonian (cont. Socrates)</b> <b>'Another Hermes', disciple of Pythagoras</b> <b>Vettius Valens (?) and others</b>	Persians defeat Chaldaeans  Zoroastrianism	Islam
Greeks		Alexander the Great The Ptolemies <b>'All Greeks were Šābi'ans' (Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle) and others</b>	Romans defeat Greeks Merging of both nations  Constantine Christianity	
Romans		Romulus August <b>'The Romans were Šābi'ans'</b>		Residual Christians and <b>Šābi'ans under Islam</b>  <b>Tābit b. Qurra al-Ḥarrānī</b>  Merging of Copts with Greeks, Romans, and others
Egyptians	Pre-deluvian Hermes (= Henoch = Idrīs), builder of Pyramids	<b>'The Egyptians were Šābi'ans'</b> <b>Proclus, Theon of Alexandria, Vettius Valens and others</b>		
Arabs	Various tribes, lost for long	<u>In the East:</u> Ġāhiliyya (Qaḥṭān and Adnān) <b>'All Arab Idolaters were in fact Šābi'ans'</b>		Muḥammad Islam replaces <b>Idolaters</b> in Arabia (as well as Persians in Iran, Byzantines in Syria, Copts in Egypt)
Jews		<u>In al-Andalus:</u> <b>Roman Šābi'ans</b>	Christianity	Islam Residual Jews under Islam

Fig. 5. Reconstruction of Šā'id's chronology of Nations

Not much is known of the people and events reported in the 'pre-deluvian' column. The figure of the first Hermes, his identification with the Jewish Henoch and with the Muslim Idris, his role in the invention of the sciences and in the construction of the Egyptian pyramids, all this material is described as legendary or mythical rather than as genuinely historical. In terms of time-measuring, this period is also one that does not resemble any of those which have followed: whereas none of these latter exceeds one or two thousand years in all, the pre-deluvian age is believed to have lasted for 360,000 years according to the Persians, and up to 4,320,000,000 years according to some Indians.

The second column is that of 'Šābi'anism'. As we remember from Šā'id's introduction, it corresponds to the epoch when the seven primeval nations 'together constituted the whole of mankind' and when 'they were all Šābi'ans'. Since we are here concerned only with Šā'id's scientific nations, there obviously cannot be traces of 'the Šābi'an Chinese' and 'the Šābi'an Turks'. Yet what our table confirms with great clarity is that an explicit statement about 'Šābi'ans' has been provided for almost all the peoples considered, generally accompanied with generalisations of the type: 'All the Greeks were Šābi'ans', 'The Romans were Šābi'ans', 'The Egyptians were Šābi'ans', 'All the Arab idolaters were in fact Šābi'ans'. As mentioned above, we even find at times that chronological bridges have purposefully been introduced between the representatives of one given Šābi'an people and those from another. Thus, while dealing with the Chaldaeans, Šā'id informs us that 'Hermes the Babylonian' was a contemporary of Socrates and that the sage Pythagoras counted 'another Hermes' amongst his pupils.

The third and four columns should help us to better visualise how things have changed from this remote period of ‘pan-Šābī’anism’ to Šā‘id’s own time. In fact, there are cases where these columns are not necessary, given that the situation has not evolved. India is a unique example of a country that has remained the home of a minority of Brahmins and of a majority of Šābī’ans up to the present. In contrast with this continuity and linearity, the history of the Persians was marked by various important turns: the 1,800 years of Šābī’anism were followed by about another 1,300 years of Zoroastrianism, and Zoroastrianism was in turn replaced with Islam. In some cases, one has also to account for the absorption of one nation by another (as with the Persians defeating the Chaldeans or the Romans defeating the Greeks), with the resultant merging of cells in the table. What the table also helps to illustrate is how Abrahamic religions contributed to eradicate the Šābī’an creed. Christianity is meant to have played this role in relation to ‘the Greeks’, to ‘the Romans’ and to ‘the Egyptians’, while Zoroastrianism is assumed to have done it in Persia and Islam in the Arab peninsula, in the age of the prophet Muḥammad himself. Although Islam is evidently presented as the dominant religion of the current age, we note with interest the presence of residual minorities such as the Christians and the Šābī’ans in the Middle East (the relevant passage actually refers to ‘Abbāsīd times, as we have seen) or the Jews in the Extreme West of the Dār al-Islam.

### Conclusions

The above textual survey shows that Šā‘id al-Andalusī attaches great importance to the Šābī’an issue. It also leads us to the conclusion that the numerous statements provided about the Šābī’ans in the different chapters of the *Ṭabaqāt* devoted to the scientific nations find themselves in the continuity of – and in good agreement with – the theory of the primeval nations that Šā‘id mentions in his prologue. From the collection of his statements we are to infer that there was a time, in a distant past yet still after the great Flood, where philosophy and the rest of the rational sciences were cultivated in various regions of the ecumene by men who shared a common view about the world. These people used to revere idols and had in common a strong penchant for the science of the stars, magic and, in general, for any kind of knowledge susceptible to lead one to understanding the destinies of human souls and to unveil the secrets of the universe. By way of their intellects, these people had arrived at the conclusion that there could only be one god. The list of their representatives include Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle and, to put it in a few words, whichever one of the ancient Greek authorities in the entire spectrum of the rational sciences. The theory also implies that these Greek masters were part of an extended network of intellectuals active in other parts of the inhabited world, such as Egypt, Persia, or India. It also supposes an intellectual filiation between these ancient masters and more recent Šābī’ans that were still in existence under Islam such as the Ḥarrānīan Ṭābit b. Qurra in ‘Abbāsīd times. In the final lines of the introduction, Šā‘id acclaims the savants of the past, irrespective of their origins, in the following words:

The men of sciences were the lights in the darkness, the indicators of the right direction, the masters of human kind, the best amongst the nations; they grasped what the Creator Most-High had allotted them and realized the objective assigned to them. May God’s prayer be upon them! How empty is this world when they are missing! (*Ṭabaqāt*, p. 11 Cheikho-Blachère)

In view of what has been recalled throughout this contribution, we may assume that the author of the *Ṭabaqāt* had also the ‘Šābī’an category’ well present in his mind when he wrote this beautiful evocation.