IBN WAḤSHIYYA AND MAGIC

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Magic has always had a role to play in Islamic society[1]. Its use has often been condemned by religious scholars, yet the efficacy of magic has never been contested; the early tenth-century religious scholar al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936), to take but one example, wrote in his dogmatical work *Ibāna* (p. 19)[2]: «(...) and we believe that there are magicians and magic in this world, and that magic is an existing entity in this world». During the Middle Ages magic always kept this role not only among common people but also among the learned. In the tenth century the Brethren o Purity wrote extensively on magic in their *Rasā'il* (esp. IV:283-335)[3] and magical elements can easily be detected from a variety of sources, including the biography of the prophet Muḥammad[4].

One of the learned authors who was very much interested in magic and esoterica was the early tenth-century Abū Bakr Ibn Waḥshiyya (alive in 318/930)[5], the author or translator of many «Nabatean» books, among them the famous *al-Filāḥa an-Nabaṭiyya*, «the Nabatean Agriculture»[6].

The Nabatean books (also called the Nabatean corpus in the following) of Ibn Waḥshiyya claim to be translations from «ancient Syriac». Both the author and his book, mainly *Filāḥa*, have been controversial since the nineteenth century, when the corpus was first enthusiatically received in Europe as deriving from the ancient Babylonians, though subsequently exposed as a forgery. There is no need to cover once again the history of the controversy[7], and it is enough to draw attention to

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[1] A lively account of the importance of magic in present-day Cairo may be found in Kornelius Hentschel, *Geister, Magier und Muslime. Dämonenwelt und Geisteraustreibung im Islam*. Diederichs Gelbe Reihe 134. München: Diederichs 1997.

[2] Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna 'an Uṣūl ad-diyāna*. Ed. 'Abdallāh Maḥmūd Muḥammad 'Umar. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya 1418/1998. The text has been translated by Walter C. Klein (*Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl al-Aš'arī's al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl ad-diyānah (The Elucidation of Islām's Foundation)*. American Oriental Series 19. New Haven: American Oriental Society 1940).

[3] *Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*. I-IV. Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir s.a.

[4] E.g. the scene of pouring water drawn from different wells on the sick Prophet: Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawīya* (I-V. Eds. Jamāl Thābit – Muḥammad Maḥmūd – Sayyid Ibrāhīm. Al-Qāhira: Dār al-ḥadīth 1996), IV:273. Translated in A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad (A translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah)* ([Oxford: Oxford University Press 1955], reprint, seventh impression, Karachi: Oxford University Press 1982), p. 679. Cf. also Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* (Handbuch der Orientalistik. Erste Abteilung, Ergänzungsband VI, 2. Abschnitt. Leiden 1972), p. 367.

[5] See *Filāḥa*, p. 5: Ibn Waḥshiyya dictated his work to Ibn az-Zayyāt in this year.

[6] Toufic Fahd (éd.), *L'agriculture nabatéenne. Traduction en arabe attribuée à Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Kasdānī connu sous le nom d'IBN WAḤŠIYYA (IV/X[e] siècle)*. I-III. Damas: Institut Français de Damas 1993-1998. The Nabatean corpus forms only a part of the works of Ibn Waḥshiyya.

[7] See, e.g. GAS (=Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*. I-IX. Leiden 1967-1984) IV:318-329.

the present situation. The majority of scholars have more or less ignored both Ibn Waḥshiyya and his works[8], whereas a few, especially Toufic Fahd, have courageously but not always coherently defended the authenticity of *Filāḥa*, not as a remnant of ancient Babylonian literature but as an authenticity Arabic translation of a fourth/fifth century AD pseudepigraphic Aramic text[9]. The other works of Ibn Waḥshiyya have received extremely scant attention, despite their obvious importance as a source for the almost unknown rural and parochial life in Iraq.

In the final analysis the question of the texts' exact provenience must still be left open, though the lack of any signs of translation in the texts as well as the absence of similar genuine texts in Aramaic argues against their authenticity.

Nevertheless, we must make a difference between the works and their material. Whether the works of the Nabatean corpus ara authentic or not, that is whether they indeed derive from complete books written in Syriac or some other form of Aramaic or not, there are features that speak in favour of the authenticity of (some of) the material in these books. First, there are several prayers in Aramaic, in Arabic script, in, e.g., *Sumūm*[10], which clearly sound Aramaic; their present corruption is most probably due to later copyists. Ibn Waḥshiyya himself could hardly have composed these prayers, so they must have come to him in either written or oral form.

Second, the local setting is given accurately, which proves that Ibn Waḥshiyya did know the area he was speaking about and thus there is nothing inherently improbable in presuming that he had access to local traditions. Third, and most importantly, much of the material has to be genuine as parallels can be found in Babylonian and Assyrian sources –I am referring to the Tammūz/Dumuzi description in particular– which proves that it cannot be a product of Muslim fiction but a report of practices in semipagan rural areas. Some of these descriptions are more detailed and accurate in the works of Ibn Waḥshiyya than in any of the other extant Muslim sources, which makes it improbable that Ibn Waḥshiyya could have found them in the Arabic literature at his disposal. Thus

[8] It seems that this attitude ultimately goes back to Theodor Nöldeke (*Noch Einiges über die «nabatäische Landwirtschaft»*. ZDMG 29 (1876):445-455) who furiously attacked *Filāḥa* and the other works of the Nabatean corpus. What obviously upset the great German scholar was the fact that the text was not what it claimed to be. Once caught and branded a red-handed liar, Ibn Waḥshiyya received no mercy from the meticulous scholar. Nöldeke's analysis is unrestrainedly malevolent.

[9] Most of Fahd's articles ara conveniently reprinted in the third volume of his edition of *Filāḥa*.

[10] See fol. 21b (for the manuscript, see below). The passage was discussed as early as in 1862 by Moritz Steinschneider, *Zur Pseudepigraphischen Literatur (insbesondere der geheimen Wissenschaften des Mittelalters*. Wissenschaftlichen Blätter aus der Veitel Heine Ephraim'schen Lehranstalt (Beth ha-Midrasch) in Berlin. I:3: Berlin 1862): 8, note 12. I have been able to use a microfilm of the following manuscripts in the *Institut für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* (Frankfurt): Oxford, Bobleian, Hunt. 75 (*Kitāb aṭ-Ṭilismāt*); British Library, Oriental manuscripts ADD 23604 (*Kitāb as-Sumūm*); MS Tehran, Majlis 6415 (*Kitāb Asrār al-falak fī aḥkām an-nujūm*).

they must stem from a living tradition –although obviously an already dying one[11].

However, it is not my intention to focus on the authenticity of the material in the present context, but to draw attention to the character of Ibn Waḥshiyya himself. Even the authorship and existence of Ibn Waḥshiyya have been doubted, but with little evidence other than the fact that he is not mentioned in the standard biographical dictionaries. Yet he is mentioned as the translator of the works of the Nabatean corpus in an-Nadīm's *Fihrist*[12] –albeit as a little known person– and there are no cogent arguments for claiming him to be a pseudonym for Ibn az-Zayyāt, his student, as has been done by, among others, Theodor Nöldeke (see below). – The biographical dictionaries are very much Islamic and urban in character, and thus it is no wonder that a parochial author of works of pagan lore is absent from all major compilations.

More fruitful than joining the discussion concerning the authenticity of the texts and the identity of Ibn Waḥshiyya would be to start by studying the stand of this person, «Ibn Waḥshiyya» (in the following without quotation marks), and his attitude towards the material he is transmitting.

As the date of Ibn Waḥshiyya can be rather firmly fixed[13] to the early tenth century[14], we may start with a comment on the general atmosphere of the period[15]. When it comes to the interest of Ibn Waḥshiyya in the occult sciences and ancient lore, one might draw attention to the many pseudepigraphical texts which we know from the same period and which also purport to be either translations or transcripts of long-forgotten texts, such as the highly interesting

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[11] I have discussed the Tammūz material in another article (*Continuity of Pagan Religious Traditions in Tenth-Century Iraq*. Melammu 3, forthcoming). It should be emphasized that when it comes to the ritual weeping for Tammūz, Ibn Waḥshiyya speaks as himself in a translator's note when describing the contemporaneous ritual weeping.

[12] An-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (ed. Ibrāhīm Ramaḍān. Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifa 1415/1994), pp. 378 and 439-440; translated by Bayard Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm (A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*. I-II. Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies LXXXIII. New York: Columbia University Press 1970), pp. 731-732 and 863-865.

[13] *Shawq al-mustahmām*, a monograph dealing with ancient and secret alphabets and edited by Joseph Hammer (*Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic characters explained; with an account of the Egyptian priests, their classes, initiation, and sacrifices, in the Arabic language by Ahmad bin Abubekr bin Wahshih*. London: Bulmer and co. 1806), is wrongly attributed to him. The word is more easily available in a French translation in Sylvain Matton, *La magie arabe traditionnelle*. Bibliotheca Hermetica (Alchimie – atrologie – magie). Paris 1977, pp. 131-241.

[14] The rare references to datable events in the works of Ibn Waḥshiyya aslo comply with this date, cf. e.g. the reference to the Caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 908-932) in *Filāḥa*, p. 548.

[15] Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticims. A Short History* (Themes in Islamic Studies 1. Leiden–Boston–Köln: Brill 2000): 107, speaks of «the relative freedom of the religious thought of the age» of al-Ḥakīm at-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932).

Daniel Apocalypse[16] or the *Prophecies of Bābā*[17]. We might also mention the Ismaili movement which was born at about the same time (discounting the traditional narrative of its origin, I find more probable to date it to the time after the minor occultation). The early Ismailis were very much interested in esoteric lore, as can be seen in the collection of the *Letters (Rasā'il)* of the Brethren of Purity who, if not Ismailis themselves, ha close relations with them.

The interest in Sabian, the last remnants of pagans in Ḥarrān and elsewhere, was also growing in the times of Ibn Waḥshiyya; in fact, the community he describes might well be labelled as «Babylonian Sabians», in contrast to both Ḥarrānian Sabians and Mandaeans (the Sabians of al-Baṭā'iḥ)[18], although the term Sabian is not often used in the works of Ibn Waḥshiyya.

The doctrines of the Sabians of Ḥarrān have received some attention both recently[19] and in Mediaeval times: an-Nadīm wrote profusely on them in his *Fihrist* and was able to quote from several, later lost works. Their later offshoot in Baghdad, it might be mentioned in passing, is a problematic source for any real, living religious practices, as the Baghdadian Sabians were heavily influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy and seem to have freely developed the Harranian religion in the light of philosophical speculation.

This is the background against which we must consider the activities of Ibn Waḥshiyya. Early tenth-century Iraq lived through an intensive period of wide interest in different religious phenomena, and especially in Neoplatonic speculations[20], and Muslim scholars with an indigenous background were eager to dig up the past legacy of their ancestors. Ibn Waḥshiyya himself often disavows *'aṣabiyya* «national pride» (see e.g. *Filāḥa*, p. 358; *Sumūm*, fols. 6b-7a) but his

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[16] There are several works under this title. The one I am referring to is found in Ibn al-Munādī, al-Malḥāḥim (ed. 'Abdalkarīm al-'Uqaylī. Qumm al-muqaddasa: Dār as-Sīra 1418/1998), pp. 76-111 (see Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Descent and Ascent in Islamic Myth*. in: simo Parpola – Robert M. Whiting, eds., Myths and Mythologies. Melammu 2, forthcoming). Another interesting but less easily datable text has been discussed by Alexander Fodor in *Malhamat Daniyal* (The Muslim East. Studies in Honour of Julius Germanus. Ed. Gy. Káldy-Nagy. Budapest: Loránd Eötvös University 1974, pp. 85-159).

[17] First discussed by Franz Rosenthal in *The Prophecies of Bābā the Ḥarrānian* (in: *A Locust's Leg: Studies in Honour of S.H. Taqizadeg*. London 1962, pp. 220-232, reprinted in: Franz Rosenthal, *Muslim Intellectual and Social History. A Collection of Essays*. Variorum Reprints CS309, 1990, as No. II). The text, Ibn al-'Adīm's *Bughyat aṭ-ṭalab fī ta'rīkh Ḥalab*, has now been edited in facsimile by Fuat Sezgin (Publications of the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science. Series C, Facsimile editions of Arabic manuscripts, 33:1-11. 1986-1989). See also Ibn Shaddād, *al-A'lāq al-khaṭīra fī dhikr umarā' ash-Shām wa'l-Jazīra* (ed. Yaḥyā Zadarīyā 'Abbāra. I:1-2. Wizārat ath-thaqāfa, iḥyā' at-turāth al-'arabī 78-79. Dimashq: Manshūrāt Wizārat ath-thaqāfa 1991) I:1, p. 49.

[18] See my *Continuity of Pagan Religious Traditions in Tenth-Century Iraq* (Melammu 3, forthcoming).

[19] See, e.g., Tamara Green, *The City of the Moon God. Religious Traditions of Harran. Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* 114. Leiden–New York–Köln: E.J. Brill 1992.

[20] For the flourishing of philosophy, see Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam. The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age*. Second revised edition. Leiden–New York–Köln: E.J. Brill 1992.

very refusal to see himself as a Nabatean nationalist shows the tenor of his work, which is remarkably pro-Nabatean.

Ibn Waḥshiyya's works remain unpublished with the exception of the recently edited *al-Filāḥa an-Nabaṭiyya*[21]. Among his works which do not purport to be translations and which thus fall outside the Nabatean corpus, there are tractates on astrology and alchemy, buy the *Kitāb aṭ-Ṭilismāt* attributed to him is hardly genuine.

Magic has a prominent role in the Nabatean corpus, especially in *Filāḥa* and *Sumūm*[22]. Following the theme of the present conference, I would like to make some comments on the relation of Ibn Waḥshiyya to magic.

First of all, it should be clear that there was no ban against such material in the early tenth century. Magic, and especially its practice, was not perhaps looked on benevolently by the *'ulamā'*, but in the Shiite Iraq governed by the Būyids there was not much possibility for the Sunni *'ulamā'* to react against those interested in magic, occult sciences and esoterica.

On the other hand, the open paganism and polytheism of much of the material in *Filāḥa* and the other Nabatean books would make it necessary for the author to keep his distance from the material. In Ibn Waḥshiyya's case this presented no great problem, since he purported only to translate, not to compose the material, and the open paganism of the text could always be labelled as merely vestiges of ancient paganism. In fact, the translator often adds clearly and strongly monotheistic notes to the text (see esp. *Filāḥa*, pp. 405-406), thus safeguarding himself from any accusations of an over close identification with the polytheistic, Nabatean system.

Ibn Waḥshiyya is also very careful, especially in *Filāḥa*, to keep his distance from black magic. In his toxicological work *Sumūm*, a more controversial book by its very nature, he is not so prudent. He also often refuses to speak of harmful uses of a plant (e.g. *Filāḥa*, p. 184, ll. 6-7) and apologizes for speaking about poisons in *Sumūm*, fol. 5a. This recurrent motif shows that Ibn Waḥshiyya was aware of the negative response his works might attract.

For Ibn Waḥshiyya, magic is a real operative force in the universe. His world view is, generally speaking, Neoplatonic, and the cult he is describing is astral, which brings with it the idea of a correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm as well as other correspondences between different phenomena.

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[21] There is also an earlier facsimile edition by Fuat Sezgin (Publications of the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science. Series C, Facsimile editions of Arabic manuscripts, 3:1-7. 1984).

[22] The translation of Martin Levey (*Medieval Arabic Toxicology. The Book on Poisons of Ibn Waḥshīya and its Relation to Early Indian and Greek Texts*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society. New Series, vol. 56, part 7. Philadephia: the American Philosophical Society 1966) is unfortunately not always well informed. See also Johann Christoph Bürgel, *Die Auferweckung vom Scheintod. Ein Topos in der medizinischen Literatur des arabischen Mittelalters* (Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften 4, 1987/88, pp. 175-194), p. 176, note 2.

The thoroughly magical worldview of Ibn Waḥshiyya is seen in the strong magical element in *Filāḥa*, a work dealing with agriculture. In this, *Filāḥa* resembles, and has perhaps been influenced by, similar Greek works, especially the book of Bōlos Dēmokritos, where magic, agriculture and folklore are found side by side[23] – On the other hand, one should not forget the sober and often experimental attitude of Ibn Waḥshiyya towards agriculture in general: he is not an obscurantist trading with talismans and amulets, but a learned and perspicacious observer.

The Nabatean books make a clear difference between black and white magic; the former harmed people, the latter protected them. In *Filāḥa*, Ibn Waḥshiyya constantly avoids black magic (see e.g. pp. 383-384), although he does refer, in the words of the purported authors of the Aramaic original, to passages in the original sources which belonged to black magic (e.g. p. 477, by Ṣughrīth). The same prudence may also be seen in his other texts, although he does give some examples of black magic, especially in *Sumūm*.

In Filāḥa, the supposed Aramaic author claims ignorance of magic (p. 147: *wa-'ilmu s-siḥri 'ilmun lam a'riḍ lahu wa-lā uḥibbu an atakallama bimā lā 'ilma lī bihi*). In *Sumūm*, black magic is somewhat more prominent. Some of the poisons described in the work belong to the sphere of black magic more than to toxicology. One of these magical operations is the grotesque recipe for creating an animal, whose sight kills. Much abbreviated the recipe goes as follows[24]:

> One takes a young, monocoloured cow, sprinkles it with human blood, has sexual intercourse with it and inserts a special dough into its vagina. Finally one anoints its vagina with ox blood. The cow is kept in a dark stall and fed with a special diet. When it gives birth, the born monster, which is described in detail, is sprinkled with another powder. Seven days after its birth, it is ready to kill by sight when it smells a wad of cotton soaked with wine and becomes upset.

The creation of a calf, although in not so colourful a fashion, is well known from early Jewish mysticism. In *Filāḥa*, p. 1318, there is also a mention of 'Ankabūthā, the chief magician, creating an anthropoid which reminds one of the Golem tradition in Kabbalistic literature[25].

The magic of Ibn Waḥshiyya consists of invocations to astral deities, magical recipes and forms of action. Most of the invocations are given only in Arabic, but a minority is also provided with the supposed Aramaic original. The text of these is heavily corrupted, as far as the manuscripts are concerned, but in the original the Aramaic may well have been flawless; in any case, several Aramaic words and

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[23] See M. Wellmann, *Die Georgika des Demokritos*. Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Jahrgang 1921, philosophisch-historische Klasse, Nr. 4. Berlin.

[24] Levey, *Medieval Arabic Toxicology*, pp. 30-31.

[25] For an up-to-date analysis of the Golem tradition, see Moshe Idel, *Golem. Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions On the Artificial Anthropoid*. SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism and Religion. Albany: SUNY Press 1990.

expressions may still be recognized. The Arabic script and the inability of the later copyists to understand the foreign words make a mess of the text, as we know also happened to the romance *kharjas*, which were definitely originally composed by poets who knew, at least to some extent, the language they used.

The Nabatean corpus contains very many invocations to astral deities, often in connection with magical preparations. The *Filāḥa* provides a very forceful invocation to Zuḥal, Saturn, in the beginning of the text (pp. 10-11). One may draw attention to the association between Zuḥal and black objects, animals, stones and plants (*Filāḥa*, p. 12), which is typical of chthonic deities, the planet Zuḥal retaining his older chthonic connotations; throughout the book he is considered the god of agriculture[26]. The burning of fourteen black bats and an equal amount of rats –black ones I suppose– before praying to Zuḥal over their ashes is to be seen as a magical preparation for an invocation for apotropaic reasons, to avoid the destructive and nefarious power of the deity.

As a Muslim, Ibn Waḥshiyya naturally has to keep his distance from this prayer, but as he claims to be translating an old text, the discrepancy between his Islamic religion and the text's paganism does not surface. On the other hand, he, as himself, the translator, vouches for the efficacy of similar prayers in many cases. In *Sumūm*, fol. 22a, he comments on the language of a prayer, Aramaic in the original, and says that the prayer may also be read in his Arabic translation. In this case, one can hardly avoid the conclusion that Ibn Waḥshiyya himself believes in the power of the prayer, thus actually compromising himself. Yet in the tenth-century Būyid Iraq this was not an issue.

This leads us to the question of the religious worldview ot the author. In some earlier studies, the supposed piety of Ibn Waḥshiyya, called a Sufi in, e.g., his *Kitāb Asrār al-falak*, fol. 87b, has been contrasted with the paganism of *Filāḥa*[27]. In a sense, the question has been wrongly posed: Ibn Waḥshiyya is definitely not an orthodox Sunni scholar, but a narrow definition of Islam as Sunni orthodoxy certainly distorts the picture. The tenth century was full of esoteric speculation, syncretism and doctrines far from the *ḥadīth*-oriented religion of the *'ulamā'*, and much of this took an Islamic garb and often especially a Sufi cloak; we are speaking of the time when al-Ḥallāj was executed (309/922), either for his wild utterances or, perhaps more probably, for some court intrigues[28]. Being a Sufi did not automatically certify orthodox beliefs[29]. – In fact, the topic should be properly studied; in some passages of *Filāḥa* (esp. pp. 256-262), both the

[26] For the subterranean realm of Zuḥal, see also *Filāḥa*, p. 727.

[27] Nöldeke, art. cit., pp. 453-455. On p. 454 Nöldeke speaks of Ibn Waḥshiyya as «der Uebersetzer als frommer Muslim un Anhänger des Ṣūfismus», casting doubts on the attribution of *Filāḥa* to him. The source proclaiming the supposed piety of Ibn Waḥshiyya is not indicated. Obviously, it was his «Ṣūfismus» which counts.

[28] See Knysh, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-79.

[29] Note also that Jābir ibn Ḥayyān is also called a Sufi en the same sources, see Ibn Waḥshiyya, *Sumūm*, fol. 6b; Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

supposed author and Ibn Waḥshiyya, the translator, ara very outspoken in their verdict against ascetism and Sufism.

The magical recipes and forms of action in *Filāḥa* are in harmony with the magic of the area since the Hellenistic period. Very prominent in the Nabatean corpus is the preparation of magical images. One of the rare occurrences of black magic in *Filāḥa* describes the preparation of an image of a man or woman, to be inscribed with his/her name, and an image of a poisonous animal, or a voracious beast, attacking him/her. The preparation of this image leads to the instant sickness or madness of the victim (*Filāḥa*, p. 147) – the purported author, though, quickly, makes it clear that he personally would never harm anybody by magic, neither an animal nor a human being like himself. Yet he does not dare speak openly against magicians because of their harmful power (p. 147). The same claim is repeated on p. 322, where the purported author identifies his enemies as the followers of Īshīthā, son of Ādamā[30].

Magical images ara also used against harmful animals. Thus, *Filāḥa*, p. 414, ll. 3-14, advises how to make an image against birds – in fact, this image might even work, as it is basically a scarecrow. In yet another recipe one needs blood and some soil from a burial ground, and from this dough «you make an image (*ṣūra*) with outstretched arms like a crucified man (*maṣlūb*)».

Another typical Near Eastern magical action, hanging a talisman on the doorpost, is also known to the author (*Filāḥa*, p. 582) and used to ward off harmful animal, like snakes, scorpions and wasps, as well as thieves, etc.

In some of the recipes, the magical and the medicinal aspects are often difficult to keep separate[31]. In many cases, the preparation includes no magical actions and, whether effective from a modern point of view or not, they clearly belong to the sphere of medicine. In other cases, different prayers and magical actions, including an astrologically selected time and place for producing the preparation, make the product magical, although one has to be aware of the importance of astrology also in «normal» medicine.

Thus, in *Filāḥa*, p. 583, there is a recipe against toothache which involves magical actions: after having prepared seven pills (*bunduq*) according to instructions, one takes them in his left hand and turning towards the moon on the twenty-fourth night of the month, takes on pill in his right hand and addresses the moon saying: «I prepared these pill as an offering (*qurbān*) to you so that you would cause the ache in my teeth to calm down and would strengthen my gums». Then he must throw the pills, one by one, towards the moon. In this case, the preparation is not even consumed and its effect is solely magical, in contrast to

[30] The identification of these sects and the probably coded names has been a favourite pastime of earlier scholars, but the present state of knowledge makes it rather useless to start speculating on their identity before we have been able to fix the text more closely to its place in history.

[31] On the relations of magic and medicine, see e.g. Manfred Ullmann, *Islamic Medicine* (Islamic Surveys 11. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1978, [repr. 1997]): 107-111.

a preparation for sexual potency, given on the same page, which falls quite clearly within the boundaries of medicine and lacks any signs of magical operations.

The purported author, Qūthāmā, also knows of popular tricksters who perform magic-like acts of entertainment. In *Filāḥa*, p. 487, he mentions a trick (*ḥīla*) of jugglers (*musha'bidhīn*) who take a handful of rice and throw it into a basin full of snakes, which makes the snakes stand on their tails and dance. This is what «the people of phantasm (*khayālāt*) and sleight of hand (*siḥr al-'ayn*) among magicians (*saḥara*) do». These snake charmers were obviously real performers seen by the author.

The magic as displayed in *Filāḥa* coincides with the common Near Eastern patterns and is in this sense genuine: whether the exact procedures were used by the pagan population –either in the tenth century or earlier, if we agree with Fahd– is another question. The Aramaic prayers would perhaps seem genuine, but when strongly Neoplatonic formulae occur in the invocations, one may doubt whether the peasants indeed used these prayers. It may be that the material is partly descriptive, describing the religious practices of the rural population, partly prescriptive, i.e. composed by the author, following pre-existing patterns, to invent new formulae.

It may strike many as surprising that there could have been rites like burnt offerings to Zuḥal in the countryside, *sawād*, of Iraq until the tenth century –if we accept a late date for the Nabatean corpus– but the evidence from Ḥarrān makes this not unprecedented, and the magical procedures throughout history have always retained archaic religious material. Likewise, the mere existence of Mandaeans shows the tolerance of Islam towards ultimately pagan religions. Had someone translated the Mandaean books into Arabic in the tenth century and circulated them outside the community, the texts would have been just as incongruent with the surrounding Islamic society as the books of the Nabatean corpus.

As the main texts of the Nabatean corpus purport to be translations of old manuscripts, the dating of the religious material in them, if it mirrors real procedures, is of course problematic. But in some cases, like when speaking about the lamentations over Tammūz, Ibn Waḥshiyya speaks as himself, adding a translator's note to the main text. Thus, at least the pagan rites described in these passages were being performed in the early tenth century.

Although ignored by compilers of biographical dictionaries, Ibn Waḥshiyya was much respected by those interested in magic, esoterica and the Nabatean or Sabian inheritance[32]. Not only was his main work, *Filāḥa*, excerpted by persons

[32] A case particularly worth mentioning is the colophon of [pseudo]-Ibn Waḥshiyya's *Shawq al-mustahām*, where (p. 136) the copyist, writing in 413 A.H., gives himself as Ḥasan ibn Faraj ibn 'Alī ibn Dā'ūd ibn Sinān ibn Thābit ibn Qurra al-Ḥarrānī al-Bābilī al-Qūqānī [text: an-Nūqānī]. Thus, an offspring of the leader of the Baghdadi Harranians is transmitting an Ibn Waḥshiyya apocryphon and, moreover, has taken as his gentilicium al-Qūqānī, a title not used by Thābit ibn Qurra but obviously taken from the works of Ibn Waḥshiyya.

such as the author of the Arabic *Picatrix* (*Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*) (Ipseudo]-al-Majrīṭī)[33] and later writers of agricultural works[34] –the latter, though, usually showed little interest for the religious and magical material in the work– but he was also profusely used by Maimonides in his *Dalāla*[35], from which source, together with *Picatrix*, the magic of the Nabateans and the Chaldaeans was transmitted into European languages.

Thus, through Ibn Waḥshiyya, the magic of the Nabateans diffused throughout the civilized world, and Ibn Waḥshiyya became an important link in the world history of magic and esoterica.

[33] Pseudo-Maǧrīṭī: *Das Ziel des Weisens*. Hrsg. Hellmut Ritter. Studien der Bibliothek Warburg XII. Leipzig–Berlin: Teubner 1933. Translated as Hellmut Ritter–Martin Plessner, «*Picatrix*», *Das Ziel des Weisens von Pseudo-Maǧrīṭī*. Studies of the Warburg Institute 27. London: The Warburg Institute–University of London 1962.

[34] In Ibn al-'Awwām's work, Ibn Waḥshiyya is by far the most frequently quoted author, see Josef Antonio Banqueri, *Libro de agricultura* (I-II. Madrid: La Imprenta real 1802, repr. Ministerio de agricultura 1988), pp. 38-39 (Preface of the reprint 1988, written by García Sánchez and J. Esteban Hernández Bermejo). Note that the statistics given by the two editors (Ibn Wahshiyya: 152 quotations in the first volume, whereas the next two authors have only 126 and 106 quotations) ignore the names of the authorities of Ibn Waḥshiyya (Qūthāmā etc.), and thus in reality Ibn Waḥshiyya is an even more important source for Ibn al-'Awwām.

[35] Conveniently available in the English translation of M. Friedländer (Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Second revised edition. Routledge and Kegan Paul 1904, reprint New York: Dover Publications s.a.).