



Type: Book Chapter

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## Other Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham

Source: *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*

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Published: Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon  
Studies, Brigham Young University, 2001

Page(s): 465–489

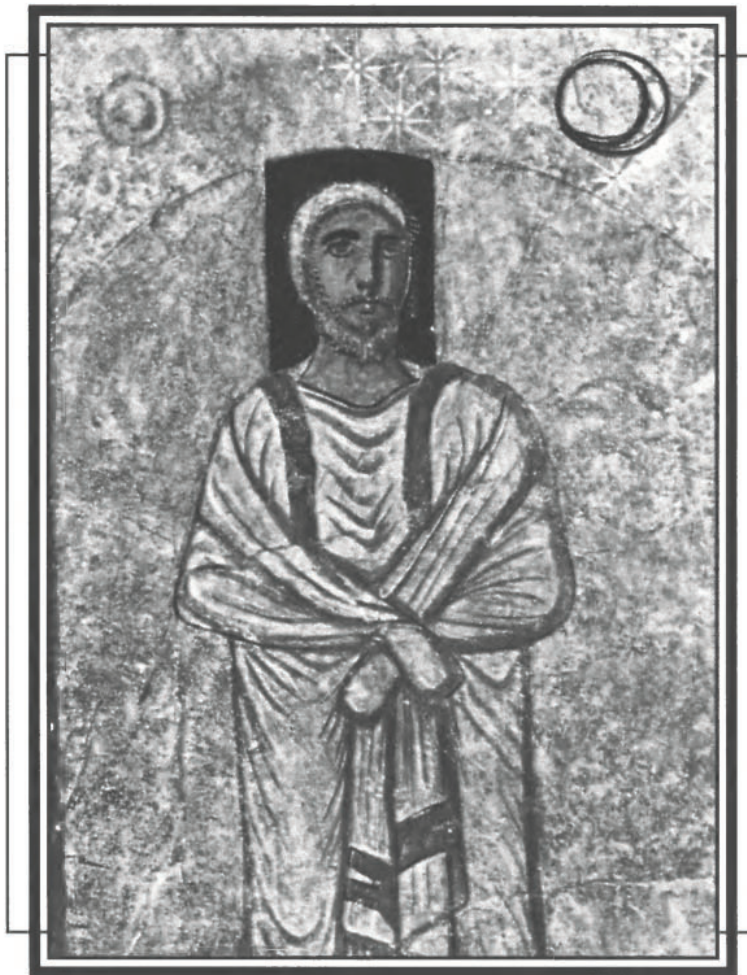
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# OTHER TRADITIONS ABOUT THE EARLY LIFE OF ABRAHAM

SECTION 5





## EXTRACTS FROM THE ASATIR

The *Asatir* (secrets, mysteries), or the *Secrets of Moses*, is a Samaritan midrashic text that combines biblical and traditional stories about the history of the earth, from the time of Adam to the death of Moses. The original editor, Moses Gaster, believed that the book was compiled no later than 250–200 B.C. He obtained an ancient Samaritan version (in Aramaic) but also knew of Arabic translations and was able to make a fairly accurate copy of the original. We use the first translation into English: Moses Gaster, trans., *The Asatir: The Samaritan Book of the "Secrets of Moses"* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1927), 242–56, versos. The chapter and verse divisions are Gaster's. The Samaritans also provided Gaster with a copy of an undated *pitron* or commentary on the *Asatir*, written in Arabic, the English translation of which is on pages 223–35, rectos, of Gaster's book. We include the commentary version of the *Asatir* in the right-hand column. We have removed the diacritics because they do not follow current usage.

### Chapter 5

16. And he [Nimrod]<sup>1</sup> did unto Arpachshad<sup>2</sup> just as Pharaoh did afterwards to the Hebrews, for he saw in the Book of Signs that there would come from Arphachshad a mighty man who would smite all the worshippers and destroy all the idols.<sup>3</sup>

And Nimrod did unto Arpachshad just as Pharaoh did unto the Hebrews. For at that time they had seen in the Book of Signs which had been handed down to them, that there would arise a man who would smite everyone who worshipped idols, and he would destroy them.

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1. Our addition.  
2. Biblical Arphaxad.  
3. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

17. And he gathered all the wise men that were among Japhet<sup>4</sup> and Ham, and he asked them that they should inform him when this one would be born.

18. [So they told him] within forty days the mother will be pregnant with him.

19. And Nimrod commanded that the sons of Arphachshad should not be allowed to approach their wives for forty days.

20. And he commanded that they should imprison the men in one place and the women in another place.

21. And after thirty days a sign was seen in the land of Shinear,<sup>5</sup> a pillar of fire.

22. And all the men were frightened with a great fear and they prayed in the houses of worship and they dwelt outside in the open field for three days and three nights.

23. And Terah went and approached his wife.

24. And when he had approached her, the sign was removed and they said: "The child will be born."

25. And Nimrod commanded that each man should return to his place.

And he gathered together all the wise men from the children of Ham and the children of Japhet. And he asked of them, that they should tell him of the day of the birth of that man; and they told him that within forty days his mother would become pregnant with him. Then the Nimrod commanded that every man of all the sons of Arpachshad should keep himself separated from his wife for the number of forty days. And they imprisoned all the men in one place and the women in another place separately.

And it came to pass after thirty of the above mentioned days that the Lord revealed a sign in the land of Shinear, and it was a pillar of fire which came down from heaven to earth. And all the inhabitants thereof were frightened with a great fear, and they made prayers in the house of their worship unto the idols, and they went out unto a field outside the town and they remained there three days, and the name (of God)—may He be exalted—gave them work and they forgot the imprisoned ones. And in that time the master Terah went by a vision of the Lord and slept with his wife, and she conceived. And when Terah had slept with his wife, he returned to the prison and the sign was lifted.

And when the wizards saw that the sign had been lifted, they said: "The child hath reached the womb of its mother"; and they told Nimrod so. And he said, "Bring out all the prisoners unto their places." And they did so, and every man went to his place as he had commanded.

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4. Biblical Japheth.

5. Biblical Shinar, where the tower of Babel was built.

26. And after that Abraham was born with mighty glory.

27. And Nimrod took him and threw him into the fire<sup>6</sup> because he has [*sic*] said “The world has a God.”<sup>7</sup>

28. And when Haran was wroth with Abraham and said he was a wizard the fire came out and consumed him “and Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in Ur Kasdim.”<sup>9</sup> After seven years he (Nimrod) died.

After this was born our master Abraham—on whom be peace—by the might of the All-powerful. And it came to pass when he grew up that Nimrod took him and placed him under his command, and he was among those who stood before him, to wait on him. And after that, he took him and cast him into the fire, but the fire could not burn our master Abraham, for God protected him, for the sake of the master of the flesh who was to come out of his loins, and also for his great righteousness. Behold what God said unto him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out from Ur (furnace) Kasdim.”<sup>8</sup>

When he saw that the fire had no power over him, Haran said, “He is a great wizard and his witchcraft prevents the fire from burning him.” Then the fire came out and consumed Haran. See what is said about him in the Holy Law, “And Haran died before the face of his father Terah in the land of his birth, Ur Kasdim!” And when Nimrod and his company saw that the fire had come forth and had consumed Haran, the fear of God came upon them, and they were frightened lest it should come out upon them and consume them also. And the Nimrod commanded that the master Abraham should come out—Praised be He, Who performeth signs and wonders, the One Who keepeth the Covenant and the mercy to those who love Him!

6. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3. In another place, the *Pitron*, speaking of Terah’s imprisonment by Nimrod, also speaks of “his son Abraham, whom they threw into the fire.” Gaster, *The Asatir*, 221.

7. Cf. Abraham 1:11–12.

8. Citing Genesis 11:28. The Hebrew term is rendered “Ur of the Chaldees” in the KJV, but is understood in Jewish tradition to be “the fire of the Chaldeans.” Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

9. Cf. Abraham 2:1.

## Chapter 6

1. With him came to an end the Kingdom of Ham: with a Nimrod it began and with a Nimrod it came to an end.

2. And from the first Nimrod to the second Nimrod there were one thousand and twenty years.

3. The first Nimrod was from Kush<sup>10</sup> and the second Nimrod was from the Kaftorim.

4. And when Nimrod had died Terah started to go into the land of Canaan to establish his kingdom.

5. His son Nahor dwelt with Kedar Laomer<sup>13</sup> and Tidal king of Goyim<sup>14</sup> and they robbed him of his kingdom.

6. And Kedar Laomer went on plundering and they sent and imprisoned Terah in Haran.

7. Then Abraham came out to meet Kedar Laomer in Ur Kasdim.

8. There God called him and he came to the land of Canaan and they dwelt in the plain of Glory and he built up the altar of Adam and Noah.

And it came to pass seven years after this occurrence that the Nimrod died and with him was completed the number of the kings, who reigned from the children of Ham. Through a Nimrod it began and through a Nimrod it came to an end, and from the first Nimrod to the second Nimrod were 1,020 years. The first Nimrod was from Kush and the second Nimrod was from the Kaftorites.<sup>11</sup>

And it came to pass after the death of Nimrod that Terah went out to go into the land of Canaan, which was outside the kingdom of Nimrod, for he was afraid lest other Nimrodim<sup>12</sup> would appear and do unto him as had done the above mentioned Nimrod. And his son Nahor dwelt with Kedar Laomer and Tidhal, King of Goyim. And it came to pass when they heard of the going out of Terah, they sent men against him to prevent him from going away, and Kedar Laomer went to plunder and kept Terah prisoner in Haran.

And Abraham went out to meet Kedar Laomer in Ur Kasdim and to prostrate himself before him [with the request] that they should release his father, Terah, from the prison. There God called him and commanded him to go out from Haran. And he came unto the land of Canaan, and Lot the son of his brother with him, and they dwelt in Elon Moreh. And now behold, O my brother, how great was the obedience of our master Abraham to his God, for he

10. Biblical Cush.

11. Biblical Caphtorim, associated with Mizraim, eponymous ancestor of the Egyptians in Genesis 10:13–14.

12. I.e., “Nimrods” (plural form).

13. Biblical Chedorlaomer. In Jewish tradition, this is another name for Nimrod.

14. Biblical Tidal, king of nations. The Hebrew term *goyim* means “nations” or “peoples.”

went from his land, and from his birthplace, and he forsook his father in the house of prison, for he was afraid to rebel against the command of God.

(Happy are those who are beloved of God, and woe unto them who hate God!) And from this thing it is known that Terah died and Abraham, his son, was not with him, and it is said that his son Nahor buried him. And this is proved by his saying—may He be exalted—“And Terah died in Haran.” And do not consider his saying, “And Terah died in Haran,” before the saying, “Get thee from thy land, from thy birthplace,” because the history begins with the second section concerning Abraham, in order that it should be set down without interruption. And there are a large number of similar statements (i.e., not in chronological order) in the Torah. And therein is no contradiction according [to]<sup>15</sup> the men of knowledge and understanding.

And Abraham dwelt in Elon Moreh, being shown thither by God—may He be exalted!—for He said unto him; “Go unto the land which I will show thee.” And the ‘Showing’ meant that he should reach Elon Moreh, for he knew that this was the place to be sought for. And he rebuilt the altar of his forefathers Adam and Noah. And after that he went up Mount Garizim to the East of Bethel. And he bowed down and prostrated himself there before God. And he worshipped and went down.

And it came to pass after these things that there was a famine in the land of Canaan, and Abraham and Lot, the son of his brother, journeyed with him from Elon Moreh, and they went down to Egypt.

9. And afterwards he went up Mount Garizim to the east of Bethel.

10. And then he started going down to Egypt.

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15. Our insertion.



11. And when he reached the boundaries of Egypt, shakings seized all the idols and trembling fell upon all the dwellers in houses of worship.<sup>16</sup>

12. For Abraham dwelt in Rifon (field?) close to Tks (border?) of Egypt which is called Alrif,<sup>17</sup> and they came to a palmgrove in the valley.

13. And there they (the Egyptians) saw Sarah and the women praised her to their husbands and the men to Pharaoh and she was taken to the house of Pharaoh. And to Abraham he did good for her sake.

14. And when Sarah was staying in the palace of Pharaoh, many wonders were seen.

15. And the princes began to be plagued privily and openly and Pharaoh became like a stone as one who has been smitten by sorcery.

16. And they said "Let there not be left out any magician or sorcerer."

17. And all the magicians and soothsayers gathered together and they were in great tribulation.

And when they reached the boundary of Egypt, there was a great shaking in all the houses of worship which were in Egypt. And all the dwellers of the houses of worship were frightened.

And Abraham encamped in a place called Hrif. And it was in those many days that the women of Egypt went out into the field to the place Hrif. And they found Sarai the wife of Abraham, and they saw that she was of a beautiful face and of a beautiful countenance. And it came to pass that when they returned from the field in the evening, they praised her before their husbands, until the word reached the minister of Pharaoh, who praised her unto him. And it came to pass when he (Pharaoh) heard the report about her, that he brought her into his house and he took her. And Abraham went with her but he could not do anything. And Pharaoh gave him many gifts and was kind to him for the sake of Sarai and Abraham went out from Pharaoh with a broken heart and a weeping eye. And he prayed unto God to save his wife Sarah from the hand of Pharaoh; and God hearkened to his prayer, and God plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues. And the plague was on the privy parts and Pharaoh was like a stone.

And he called all the wizards of Egypt and its wise men and he gathered them together and there was among them a wizard

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16. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

17. Perhaps modern Al-Arish, on what was known biblically as "the river of Egypt." Date palms are still found in the region.

18. And there was among them a sorcerer called Turts who had learned the Book of Signs in Hanohiah.

19. And he was wroth and said "He who worships the God of the whole world is here, and all this distress is for his sake."

20. And when Abraham heard mention of the God of the whole world, then he quickly turned with prayers as towards heaven.

21. Then they were freed (from the plague) and the whole palace was lit up by the sight of the glory of the face of Sarah and there (fell) upon them great fear.

22. Then it became known that Sarah was the wife of Abraham, and Pharaoh's tongue was set free and he began to speak and Abraham proclaimed and prayed for the loosening of the bonds.

23. And this is the first proclamation (of faith) for Abraham said: "O, Lord! God of heaven and Earth, all merciful, be merciful."

24. And the house(hold) of Pharaoh began to be healed and all the houses of

and his name was Turts, who had studied in the Book of Signs. He had learned that book in from [*sic*] Enoch, the son of Kain, and he strengthened himself in Hanohia and said, "There is in this place a woman, who is a faithful one, believing in God, and all these visitations [are]<sup>18</sup> for her sake."

And when our master Abraham—on whom be peace—heard what had happened to Pharaoh and to his house, he rose up and lifted up his face unto heaven and praised God, and he thanked Him and he sanctified Him for all the good He had done him, in that He had preserved unto him Sarai his wife from defilement.

Then it became true and known unto them that this had come through the evil deeds which had been done by Pharaoh. And no man could look on Sarah and no one could see her face. On her face the light was shining strongly. This is proved by his saying, "And they were freed (i.e. from the plague) and they saw that the whole palace was lit up from the appearance of the face of Sarah, and there was great fear." And thereby it became known that Sarah was the wife of Abraham. And Pharaoh begged relief of him, and gave back his wife Sarah, and he went away in rejoicing and in peace, with the innocence of his wife. And he stood before God and prayed for Pharaoh and for his house. This is the first prayer which our master Abraham prayed. And this is the whole of what he said in his prayer, "O Lord, the God of Heaven and the God of the earth, All Merciful, be merciful." And God healed Pharaoh and his house, and then Pharaoh believed in the truth of the faith of Abraham, since

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18. We have replaced the word *one* here.

worship were destroyed and the objects of worship in them fell down and could not be raised up.<sup>19</sup>

25. And the magician Turts went up from there to Hebron.

26. And Pharaoh appointed men, and he sent him (Abraham) away and his wife and Lot who was with him.

his prayer was received and his God was the God of Gods and the Lord of Lords, and He performed wonders for Abraham's sake. And he knew that his prayer before the idols had not cured him from the plague which he had, but that only the prayer of Abraham to his God had cured him. At that time he commanded the destruction of the houses wherein the idols were, and the breaking of the idols and the destruction of all the pillars, and he commanded that those who worshipped them should be killed,<sup>20</sup> as there was no use for them, and whoever prostrated himself before them, became worthless in this world and a sinner at the end of days. And all this is made evident from his word in the Asatir. "And all the houses of worship were destroyed and all those things (i.e., the idols) before which people prostrated themselves fell down and could not be raised up."

And the wizard Turts went up from there, when he saw what Pharaoh had done to the houses of worship and to the idols and to the pillars; for he could not stay in Egypt any longer. And he went up thence and he went to Hebron.

And afterwards Pharaoh commanded men from among his people and he said unto them that they should go with Abraham and lead him to the place which he would choose. They were not to forsake him and anyone who would do anything to him or to his wife should surely die. And they did as Pharaoh commanded them and they came with him and with Lot, his brother's son, with their flocks and with everything which they possessed, until they

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19. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

20. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

27. And they came to the place of the first altar and they raised it up again. And he brought thankofferings and praise offerings.

reached Elon Moreh, the place of the first altar. And Abraham built up the above mentioned altar, and he brought up sacrifices unto God, who had saved him from the hand of the Egyptians. And Abraham and Lot dwelt in the land of Canaan one year.

## EXTRACTS FROM VETTIUS VALENS

Vettius Valens (A.D. 102–52) of Antioch wrote a nine-book treatise on astrology (which at the time was identical with astronomy). His treatise is the major collection of extant Greek horoscopes other than individual papyri containing such. Heavily used during the Middle Ages, his work has survived in many manuscripts. The text was first published in 1532. Like Firmicus Maternus (below), Vettius Valens attributes some of his information to books Abraham wrote. This previously unpublished translation from the Greek was made by John Gee, from *Vettii Valentis Antiocheni anthologiarum libri novem*, ed. David Pingree (Leipzig: Teubner, 1986), 91, 92.

### *Anthologiae 2.28.3*

The most wonderful Abraham showed us in his books about this subject,<sup>1</sup> clarifying the explanations of others and his own, discovering and testing other things, especially concerning the beginnings of journeys abroad, which have these features [i.e., when is the most auspicious time to begin a journey abroad].

### *Anthologiae 2.29.1–6*

The lot concerning a foreign place is calculated from Saturn to Mars, and the like by horoscope. On the one hand, these visible objects make the beginning [of the journey] propitious; on the other hand, some times and seasons, journeyings abroad will be of such beginnings that the pattern declared by Abraham makes clear. We have augmented the things which have been preserved from him down to me. Let no one who chances upon our writings censure us if we make no mention of the labors and traditions of others as some have—we witness before men [that they have]. Now, we come to the matter at hand.

When separating the times of activities, according to Abraham, which are divided from the fate [spirit]—for he divides it so—wherever the lot of the fate [spirit] falls upon the birth,<sup>2</sup> look at the lord [spirit] of the zodiacal sign where the lot is found, how many years the smallest circle takes, and divide these into the twelve zodiacal signs, who making the beginning of the division from that same spirit according to the following zodia-

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1. Cf. Abraham 1:31.

2. Cf. Abraham 3:21–24.

cal signs. Then when its circle is complete, look again at the lord of the spirit of the following zodiacal sign, how many years the circle takes, and divide that likewise; and the fortune lies in the following if it has a year of life.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

## EXTRACTS FROM FIRMICUS MATERNUS

Firmicus Maternus (fl. A.D. 334–37) was born to an aristocratic family in Syracuse. He wrote the longest astrological/astronomical treatise in Latin known. Later he converted to Christianity and wrote a treatise advocating the eradication of all other religions. Here we quote his astrological treatise because he claims to base his information on Abraham's writings. This previously unpublished translation from the Latin was made by John Gee from *Ivlii Firmici Materni Matheseos libri VIII*, ed. W. Kroll and F. Skutsch (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1968), 1:196, 238, 239, 242; 2:287–93. All angle brackets (<>) are in the edited Latin text.

### ***Mathesis 4 Proem 5***

Everything therefore which Mercury passed down to Aesculapius<sup>1</sup> which Petosiris and Nechepso explained and which Abraham, Orpheus, and Critodemus wrote,<sup>2</sup> and all the others who knew this art, being equally surveyed, collected and compared for various contrary statements, in these books we reveal the divine science<sup>3</sup> to all Romans.

### ***Mathesis 4.17.2***

Next, everything which we will explain, when we come to the interpretation of the barbaric sphere;<sup>4</sup> all these therefore that divine Abraham and most wise Achilles tried to discover by most reliable reasoning.

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1. Mercury is a translation of the Greek Hermes, which is in turn a translation of the Egyptian Thoth, the Egyptian god of knowledge and source of all learning. Aesculapius is a translation from Greek Asklepios, which in turn refers to the Egyptian Imhotep/Imouthes. Imhotep was a Third Dynasty Egyptian physician and official and the architect of the Step Pyramid at Saqqara. In later Egyptian times, Imhotep was deified and worshiped. Greeks who settled in Egypt adopted the Egyptian religion (though they used Greek names for the Egyptian deities) and in turn passed it on to the Romans. Astronomical and Hermetic texts often refer back to this story of the origin of their science.
  2. Cf. Abraham 1:31.
  3. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.
  4. Ibid.

**Mathesis 4.17.5**

This place shows the native land [or the four sides of this place] with easy calculation. It is called, however, just as Abraham designated,<sup>5</sup> the place of the moon [i.e., the region of the sky where the moon predominates].<sup>6</sup>

**Mathesis 4.18.1**

We have described the place of fate [spirit]<sup>7</sup> by this method, which therefore we insert into this book, because Abraham showed by similar reasoning<sup>8</sup> that this is the place of the sun and was unequal, so that the place of the sun was separate from the locus of the moon. This place is described by this method: in the coming day, you distribute all the gathered parts of all the constellations [zodiacal signs]<sup>9</sup> from the region of the sun to the region of the moon, starting from the horoscope through the constellations in order, and in whichever constellation the last part falls, that shows you the region of the fate [spirit].

**Mathesis 8.3.5–8.4.14**

3.5 Therefore in order for me to show this<sup>10</sup> to you, not by argument but the thing itself, we have given that tractate excerpted from the books of Abraham,<sup>11</sup> so that this our discourse, which we have said, is indicated to you by an obvious interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

4.1. [The parts of Aries.]<sup>13</sup> Now I will take care to indicate to you which parts in which signs by the parts you seek. Then all thirty parts are divided through all the bodies of the signs. So that you therefore know where the first part should be and where the second,

5. Cf. Abraham 1:31.

6. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

7. Cf. Abraham 3:21–24.

8. Cf. Abraham 1:31.

9. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

10. “This” refers to the arrangement of the zodiac in the sky and the fact that the signs of the zodiac do not necessarily follow head to tail for the whole zodiac. Firmicus has just discussed the implications of this view for whether zodiacal signs three signs apart could “see” or “hear” each other, depending on whether or not the correct body part of the sign was in the sky at the same time as the other constellation.

11. Cf. Abraham 1:31.

12. The book of Abraham quoted by Firmicus Maternus divides the sky into 360 sections. This division matches the Egyptian calendar of 360 days. The Egyptians divided the circle of the sky into thirty-six decans that correspond to periods of 10 days each. The Egyptian decans are slightly different from the zodiac as they are located south of the zodiac in the sky, but like the zodiac, they are used for the measurement of time, as three decans cover approximately the same arc in the sky as one sign of the zodiac. See Otto Neugebauer and Richard A. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1960–69), 1:95–107.

13. The Egyptians divided Aries into three decans: *chontare* (*ḥnt(w)-ḥr(w)*), *chonachre* (*ḥnt(w)-ḥrw*), and *siket* (*s; qd*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–70. All three of these are attested in Abraham’s day; *ibid.*, 1:3, 24.



and where others, all this I will show you briefly. First and second parts consist of the horns of Aries, third indeed and fourth and fifth, in the head; sixth indeed and seventh in the face; eighth indeed and ninth and tenth in the mouth; eleventh indeed and twelfth in the chest; thirteenth and fourteenth and fifteenth in all the neck; sixteenth and seventeenth in the heart, eighteenth and nineteenth in the right arm; twentieth and twenty-first and twenty-second <in the left arm>, in the belly indeed twenty-third and twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth; most recently the feet have the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh parts, and in kidneys indeed twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth; in the tail <it has> the thirtieth part. So thirty parts are divided through the whole body of Aries.<sup>14</sup>

4.2. [The parts of Taurus.]<sup>15</sup> The first and second parts in Taurus constitute the horns; the third indeed and fourth and fifth, in all the face, the sixth and seventh in the neck; the eighth and ninth and tenth in the front; the eleventh and twelfth in the heart; the thirteenth indeed and fourteenth in the forearm; the sixteenth and seventeenth are set in the forefeet of Taurus; the eighteenth indeed and nineteenth and twentieth are in the belly; twenty-first in the knee, twenty-second and twenty-third and twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth are located in the rear feet; twenty-sixth indeed and twenty-seventh are in the generative organs of Taurus. In the hip indeed twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth, in the tail indeed is found only the thirtieth part. So through all, the body of Taurus is divided into numbers of parts. But the Barbaric Sphere is made of another ordering of parts.<sup>16</sup>

4.3. [The parts of Gemini.]<sup>17</sup> The first and second parts constitute the head of those twins (Gemini), which are situated toward the eagle; the third indeed and fourth and fifth <are in the face of Gemini; sixth and seventh> are in the heart of Gemini; eighth and ninth and tenth in the chest; eleventh and twelfth in the hands; thirteenth and fourteenth and fifteenth in the feet. In Gemini indeed we find those parts situated in the south. But first we need to know that which this space which is between both twins, sixteenth and seventeenth. Parts eighteenth and nineteenth and twentieth of Gemini are located in the head of the southern twin; in the face, indeed twenty-first and twenty-second and twenty-third, under the belly indeed twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth, and twenty-sixth, in the knees however, twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth, in the feet only the thirtieth.<sup>18</sup>

14. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

15. The Egyptians divided Taurus into three decans: *choou* (*ḥꜥw*), *ero* (*ꜥrt*), and *rombromare* (*rmn ḥry*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–71. Of these, *choou* (*ḥꜥw*) “the thousands” and *rombromare* (*rmn ḥry*) “the upper arm (of Orion)” have translations; *ibid.*, 1:24–25. All three are attested in Abraham’s day; *ibid.*, 1:3, 24–25.

16. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

17. The Egyptians divided Gemini into three decans: *thosolk* (*ṯs ꜥrq*), *ouare* (*wꜥrt*), and *phouori* (*phꜣwy ḥry*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–71. The names have the following meanings: *thosolk* (*ṯs ꜥrq*) “the knot of the belt,” *ouare* (*wꜥrt*) “the leg (of Orion),” and *phouori* (*phꜣwy ḥry*) “the lower end”; *ibid.*, 1:24–25. The first two are attested in some form in Abraham’s day; *ibid.*, 1:3, 24–25.

18. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

4.4. The parts of Cancer are divided in this manner.<sup>19</sup> The first and second parts of Cancer are located in the head; the third and fourth and fifth in the neck, in the throat indeed sixth and seventh; indeed the three following we find in the eyes. This nebula of Cancer is that of which we frequently speak. Eleventh and twelfth are in the back; but the three following stretch from the stomach to the comb; the three following we find between the forearms of Cancer; but the seven following are located in the right feet of Cancer; but twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh are in the left feet of Cancer; in the last feet indeed are twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth; in the tail only the thirtieth.<sup>20</sup>

4.5. The parts of Leo are divided in this manner.<sup>21</sup> The first and second parts are located in the head of Leo; the three following are divided in all the face and in the nose; three others following are placed in the ears of Leo, in the heart indeed the same number, three in the arms, three in the feet, the two following in the belly, twentieth part indeed and twenty-first and twenty-second we find in the back, in the chest we look for twenty-third and twenty-fourth; the three following remain in the knees; twenty-eighth is in the generative organ of Leo, twenty-ninth in the kidneys; the thirtieth alone is found in the tail.<sup>22</sup>

4.6. The parts of Virgo are divided in this manner.<sup>23</sup> The first and second parts are located in the head of Virgo; the three following parts indeed in the face; sixth indeed and seventh in the hands, the three following indeed <in the spine; in the shoulders indeed eleventh and twelfth; the following> three in order in the chest; sixteenth indeed and seventeenth in the right breast; the three following indeed are located in the right foot; <. . .><sup>24</sup> twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh are located in the left foot, in the kidneys indeed the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth, in the generative organs of the body only the thirtieth.<sup>25</sup>

4.7. The parts of Libra are divided in this manner.<sup>26</sup> The first and second parts are located in the head; the third indeed and fourth and fifth in the left part of the balance; the sixth indeed and seventh are located in the right part of the balance; the eighth <and>

19. The Egyptians divided Cancer into three decans: *sothis* (*spdt*), *sit* (*št*), and *chnoumis* (*knmt*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–70. The names mean *sothis* (*spdt*) “Sirius” and *sit* (*št*) “the two tortoises”; *ibid.*, 1:25. All three are attested in Abraham’s day; *ibid.*, 1:3, 25.

20. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

21. The Egyptians divided Leo into three decans: *charchnoumis* (*ħry ħpd knmt*), *epe* (*ħst ħꜥw*), and *phoupe* (*phwy ħꜥw*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–70. All three are attested in Abraham’s day; *ibid.*, 1:3, 25.

22. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

23. The Egyptians divided Virgo into three decans: *tom* (*tmꜥt*), *ouestebkot* (*wšꜥt bkꜥt*), and *aphoso* (*ipsd*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–70. All three are attested in Abraham’s day; *ibid.*, 1:2, 24.

24. The manuscripts here omit the next six parts.

25. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

26. The Egyptians divided Libra into three decans: *souchoe* (*sbħs*), *ptechout* (*tpy-ħnt*), and *chontare* (*ħnt ħrt*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–70. All three are attested in Abraham’s day; *ibid.*, 1:2, 24.

ninth and tenth are located in [. . .];<sup>27</sup> the eleventh and twelfth parts are found in the left part of the yoke; and the three following we find in the right part of the yoke; the sixteenth and seventeenth in the heart of Libra; the four following in order are acknowledged in the right hand of Libra; in the chest are located the twenty-second and twenty-third; the three following are in its kidneys; the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth are spread to the ends of the feet. The rest until the thirtieth are located in the numbers. In this part, that is, in the ends, the earth is said to be brought together.<sup>28</sup>

4.8. The parts of Scorpio are divided in this manner.<sup>29</sup> The first and second parts are located in the head of Scorpio; the next three in the front; the sixth and seventh in the face; the two that follow are set in the back; after [. . .] the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth in the belly;<sup>30</sup> indeed in the right hand are located the three following in order; in the left two; in the right feet indeed the next two are set; in the left feet three; in its sting indeed which is extended toward the Big Dipper are located the last five parts.<sup>31</sup>

4.9. The parts of Sagittarius are divided through its whole body in this manner.<sup>32</sup> In the head of Sagittarius are located the first and second parts; the three following indeed are placed in order in the face; the two which follow the preceding parts are located in the ears of Sagittarius; the three following in order are set in the neck of Sagittarius; the two following indeed in the left hand; three others in the bow; in the feet two, and three others are located in the back; in the belly of the horse two; in the back two feet indeed until the hooves are located the three parts that follow; the twenty-sixth indeed and twenty-seventh are located in the generative organs of Sagittarius; the following two indeed are set in the right hand; only the thirtieth part is located in the tail.<sup>33</sup>

27. The manuscripts here omit the location.

28. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

29. The Egyptians divided Scorpio into three decans: *stochnene* (*spt ḥnwj*), *sesme* (*sšmw*), and *sisieme* (*s3 sšmw*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–70. Only the first two of these names is attested in Abraham's day; *ibid.*, 2:24. The names mean *sesme* (*sšmw*) "guides" and *sisieme* (*s3 sšmw*) "son of the guides"; *ibid.*, 1:24. There was a confusion during the Middle Kingdom between the decan *sšmw* "guides" and *šsmw* Shesmu, the god of the wine press and human sacrifice; *ibid.*, 2:24. See also Mark Ciccarello, "Shesmu the Letopolite," in *Studies in Honor of George R. Hughes*, ed. Janet H. Johnson and Edward F. Wente (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1976), 43–54; cf. Abraham 1:7–20, 30; Abraham Facsimile 1.

30. A lacuna occurs in all manuscripts here. One manuscript has part of the lacuna, which I have inserted here.

31. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

32. The Egyptians divided Sagittarius into three decans: *reouo* (*ḥry-ib wi3*), *sesme* (*sšmw*), and *komme* (*knmw*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–70. All three of these names are attested in Abraham's day; *ibid.*, 1:2, 24. The names mean *reouo* (*ḥry-ib wi3*) "dweller in the solar bark" and *sesme* (*sšmw*) "guides"; *ibid.*, 1:24. There was a confusion during the Middle Kingdom between the decan *sšmw* "guides" and *šsmw* Shesmu, the god of the wine press and human sacrifice; *ibid.*, 24. See also Ciccarello, "Shesmu the Letopolite," 43–54; cf. Abraham 1:7–20, 30, Facsimile 1.

33. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

4.10. The parts of Capricorn are divided through the whole body in this manner.<sup>34</sup> The first and second parts are located in the horns, the three following in the head; the sixth and seventh are set in the face; the three following in the order are constituted in the ear of Capricorn. In these parts, which are in the ear of Capricorn, if it [the ear] has the moon, it is possible for this to be adorned with the testimony of the benevolent, it makes the ears of men impure, and makes the lips of lustful women polluted. For if women have the moon in this part, they will all be possessed of an immodest life of impurity. The eleventh is located in the heart of Capricorn; the twelfth and thirteenth in the neck; in the shoulder the next two; in the right hand indeed are located the next three in order; the two which follow these in the back, three following in the belly; the four indeed which follow are set in both directions to hide; the last three in order are located in the tail, continuously to the last plume of Capricorn.<sup>35</sup>

4.11. The parts of Aquarius are divided through its whole body in this manner.<sup>36</sup> In its head the first and second parts are located; the three following in the face; the sixth and seventh in the back; the three which are after these in order are located in the chest; in the right hand indeed the eleventh and twelfth are set. The three which are after these are located in the water of Aquarius; sixteen and seventeen are set in the left hand; the two which follow these [. . .]<sup>37</sup> Two others are set in the belly; the three following are scattered through the end of the feet; another three in the kidneys; indeed the last three we find in the vessel of Aquarius.<sup>38</sup>

4.12–13. The parts of Pisces are divided through the whole body in this manner.<sup>39</sup> But we need to know that one fish (Piscis) lies to the south, the other to the north. The first and second parts are located in the ear of the southern fish; the third indeed and fourth and fifth are set in the head of that fish; in the throat two; the three which follow in

34. The Egyptians divided Capricorn into three decans: *smat* (*smd*), *sro* (*srt*), and *isro* (*s3 srt*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–70. All three names are attested in Abraham's day; *ibid.*, 1:2, 24. The names mean *sro* (*srt*) "ewe," and *isro* (*s3 srt*) "son of the sheep"; *ibid.*, 1:24. Of these, *sro* appears to the left of Abraham Facsimile 2, figure 6. For commentary, see Marie-Louise Ryhiner, "À propos de trigrammes panthéistes," *Revue d'Égyptologie* 29 (1977): 125–37, and F. Ll. Griffith and Herbert Thompson, *The Demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden* (London: Grevel, 1904–9), 1:22.

35. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

36. The Egyptians divided Aquarius into three decans: *ptiau* (*p3 tpy-ꜥ ʒḥwy*), *aeu* (*ʒḥwy*), and *ptebuou* (*p3 tpy-ꜥ b3wy*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–70. All the names or variations thereof appear in Abraham's day; *ibid.*, 1:2, 24. The names mean *ptiau* (*p3 tpy-ꜥ ʒḥwy*) "predecessor of the two spirits," *aeu* (*ʒḥwy*) "the two spirits," and *ptebuou* (*p3 tpy-ꜥ b3wy*) "predecessor of the two souls"; *ibid.*, 1:24–25. Of these, *aeu* (*ʒḥwy*) appears on the left in Abraham Facsimile 2, figure 18.

37. The manuscripts are missing this section.

38. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

39. The Egyptians divided Pisces into three decans: *biou* (*b3wy*), *chontare* (*ḥnt ḥrw*), and *ptibiou* (*p3 tpy ʒ3wy*); Neugebauer and Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, 3:168–70. All these names or variations thereof are attested in Abraham's day; *ibid.*, 1:2, 24. The names mean *biou* (*b3wy*) "the two souls," and *ptibiou* (*p3 tpy ʒ3wy*) "he who is over the scepter"; *ibid.*, 1:24–25. Of these, *biou* (*b3wy*) appears in Abraham Facsimile 2, figure 4.

order are located in the neck; the eleventh indeed and twelfth are found in the end of the spine; indeed, the following three in order are in the back of that fish. The sixteenth and seventeenth and eighteenth we find in the line of Pisces. In that indeed which lies on the north, the nineteenth is set in the head, the three following indeed in the chest; in the neck the three others which follow, in the tail the two latest are located. But the three last parts of Pisces which are between Aries and Pisces are always unseen, being obscured by fog. This is the reason one should have the sun or the moon in that part, without the testimony of benevolent stars, he will be afflicted with either perpetual blindness or bad eyesight.<sup>40</sup>

4.14. From these divisions and parts with the place of faults, and the health, you are able most manifestly and easily to find all of this.

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40. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

## EXTRACTS FROM A FALASHA STORY

The Falasha of Ethiopia are a Jewish group whose origins are thought to predate the development of the oral law of rabbinic Judaism in the first centuries after Christ. They know nothing of this law and continue to live the law of Moses. In recent years, after official recognition by the chief rabbis of Israel, many Falasha have immigrated to the Holy Land. While it is unlikely that the Falasha could have heard tales of Abraham from other Jewish groups, they may have borrowed some from their Christian or Muslim neighbors. Consequently, we cannot know if the story below is indigenous to the Falasha. This story is from a Falasha text called *Tēḥzāza Saḥbat* (Commandment of the Sabbath). The date of the text is uncertain, but the text is probably not older than the fourteenth century; the translation we use is the first in English, made from the original Gēḥz by Wolf Leslau, *Falasha Anthology* (New Haven: Yale, 1951), 26–28. For reference purposes, we have numbered the paragraphs.

1. Then Thou didst appear to Abraham, and Thou didst love him until the end of the world, him and you [?], to bless him and to multiply his seed as the stars of the Heaven and as the sands on the sea(shore). From among his seed Thou hast established a covenant with Isaac who purified his body from the spot of sin; and with Jacob, His beloved. As God brought forth Noah [from the ark] with His advice and wisdom at the time of the flood, so He brought forth Abraham from the country of the Chaldeans.<sup>1</sup>

2. The wise of Canaan said (to Nimrod): “Behold, Terah will beget a son who will pervert and destroy the precepts of Canaan.” And while they divined, Terah begat a son and called him Abraham. He put him into a cavern of his house for seven years, and then he let him go out one night. Abraham saw the moon and the stars and said: “They shall be my masters, and I shall worship them.” The second night he saw the moon and worshiped it. When the moon set and it became dark Abraham said: “Neither the moon nor the stars are gods.” Terah again put him into the cave. His heart<sup>2</sup> was boiling, and he went out the third day at noon. He saw the sun, worshiped it, and said: “The sun will be my God, its light is the brightest.” But when the sun set it became dark and the sun disappeared. Abraham turned his face toward the east and said: “Be my God, Thou who

1. Cf. Abraham 1:19.

2. Translator’s note: “The text has ‘intelligence.’”

hast created everything, and I shall not worship another, but Him who has created the sun and the moon."<sup>3</sup>

3. Abraham saw all the idols which Terah had made.<sup>4</sup> He took an ax and clove the carved idols and broke them to pieces<sup>5</sup> and laid the ax on the neck of one of them. When Terah saw the broken idols he shouted and said: "Who [did] all this?" They said to him: "We know not." Terah said: "I know who did this," and he called Abraham and said to him: "Why hast thou broken my idols?" Abraham said: "It was not I but this great god who broke them because of jealousy. Behold, the ax is on his neck. And thou worshipest him!" Terah said: "This one cannot break (anything)." [Abraham said]: "Why then dost thou worship him? A man kills even his son or his father through submission to this idol and zeal for it."<sup>6</sup> Terah said: "Verily, I know that my son will abolish the religion of Canaan." He sent him to Nimrod,<sup>7</sup> the king of Canaan,<sup>8</sup> and he said to him: "This is how my son acts, he hates my idols and has broken them." Nimrod said to him: "Is it true, what he has said? Come, let us worship this idol." Abraham refused [and said]: "My God is in Heaven. It is He who has created the sun, the moon, the heavens, and the earth. He who appoints thee king is in Heaven." Nimrod said: "I shall ascend into Heaven and kill him whom thou callest thy God."<sup>9</sup> He took arrows and a bow, rode upon the vultures, put a piece of meat upon their heads so that he would not miss the way—this was a remedy—and they ascended straight before them. When he reached the clouds an eagle saw the meat above his head. Nimrod pierced the eagle above his head [with an arrow]. He then collected the arrows, descended to Abraham and said to him: "Behold the blood of God, I killed Him." Abraham said: "My God dies not. It is He who causes to die."<sup>10</sup> Nimrod said: "Will a rebellious son come from the seed of Terah?" They said: "We heard it."

4. Nimrod sent a thousand camels into the field to cleave trees, had a pit [?] dug on a hill [?], and the trees thrown upon it, and spread everything that the thousand [camels] carried and set it on fire. He said: "O Abraham, let us worship this idol, or perhaps thou dost not want to?" Abraham was obstinate and refused. Nimrod said to him: "I shall surely cast [thee] into the oven and burn thee in the flames." Abraham heeded it not and would not change his mind and worship the idol. He threw him into the flames.<sup>11</sup> God said to [Gabriel]: "Go down and hit the flames of fire."<sup>12</sup> And he became water that quenched

3. Cf. Abraham 2:12; 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

4. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

5. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

6. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

7. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 30.

8. According to Genesis 10:8, Nimrod was son of Canaan's brother Cush. But cf. Abraham 1:21–27.

9. The translator indicates that the story of Nimrod's attempt to kill God probably derives from Arabic sources.

10. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39.

11. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 11–12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

12. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

the fire [?] of the oven. From that day until today it is called Kaladewon.<sup>13</sup> (It recalls) what God had said to the children of Israel: "It is I who brought you forth<sup>14</sup> from Egypt."

5. He named him Abraham.<sup>15</sup> Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob. The children of Israel, from among the Chaldeans, drank that flame which became water and dried not up, nor ceased from then until now.

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13. Probably Chaldea.

14. Translator's note: "The text has 'who lets you come.'"

15. Probably a reference to Genesis 17:4.



## EXTRACTS FROM THE STORY OF QIQEL AND THE DEATH OF YAHYA

The Mandaeans are a sect located in southern Iraq and Iran; they are neither Jewish, Christian, nor Muslim. They call themselves the *Naṣurai* (Nazarenes) and claim that John the Baptist is the founder of their religion and that they are descendants of his disciples. The Mandaean account known as *The Story of Qiqel and the Death of Yahya* deals with the ascension of Qiqel and the death of John the Baptist (Yahya). In the account of Qiqel, Abraham appears as a Dervish (*darwish*) named Bahram. The story bears some resemblance to Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions about Abraham. The account used here is taken from E. S. Drower, who collected oral traditions and stories in her book *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (1937; reprint, Leiden: Brill, 1962), 274–78. For reference purposes, we have numbered the paragraphs.

1. They [Qiqel and the as-yet-unnamed *darwish*]<sup>1</sup> saw many visions. They saw a vision of Liwet Qadeshta (Venus the Sacred); they saw the likeness of Shamish and Sin,<sup>2</sup> and the head of ʿUr which is lifted towards Awathur, and the *ʿuthri* [angels] who are with the stars.<sup>3</sup> They saw them in the clay room, from the openings.

2. And after that they rose and collected some of the Nasurai and Mandai who had been scattered in the district and they taught them. Ten men, ten pious men, they brought to be of their fellowship. And they made an image of him whom they had seen in the sky—of him at whom they had gazed through the opening. They made images of them all in stone,<sup>4</sup> of Nirigh,<sup>5</sup> of Bel,<sup>6</sup> of Liwet and Sin, and this last, of the moon, had seven heads branching out like a tree.<sup>7</sup> Of Shamish, the sun, they also made an image, but they

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1. This and the next bracketed material are our additions.

2. Shamash and Sin are the Mesopotamian gods of the sun and the moon.

3. Cf. Abraham 3:1–18.

4. Cf. Abraham 1:11.

5. Evidently the Mesopotamian god Nergal.

6. Bel or Marduk was the god of Babylon.

7. The seven-branched tree of life is known from ancient Mesopotamian iconography. It is related to the seven-branched “candlestick” or menorah of the tabernacle of Moses.

were unable to make it aright, for he is all light, many-eyed, of various appearances, of different forms which turn and wheel and radiate. But they made an image of a person sitting, of extreme beauty, like one form of Shamish. When one sees Shamish in this form, a sweet wind breathes upon one, and one swoons away because of its great loveliness. All the images which were made and worshipped later in that place had their origin in the images which these two made.<sup>8</sup>

3. The name of that *darwish* was Bahram, and he had a special secret knowledge which he imparted to his pupils. When they knew it, they might be thrown into fire, and they would not burn, and into water, and they would not drown, nor would a sword eat them, for, if a man drew a sword against them it was he who fell, not they. Such power came from them that it repulsed the sword. Their place was in the north—somewhere near Damascus, Jerusalem, and Egypt.<sup>9</sup> . . .

4. But of these *darawish*,<sup>10</sup> Bahram, Qiqel, and their brethren. Once a tribe, a people, came upon them and asked, “Who are ye?”

5. They replied, “We are darawish who have settled here.”

6. They said, “Darawish! What is your occupation?”

7. They answered, “We till the ground, and harvest and pray. That is all.” For they had no wives. They had become learned in the knowledge of those who travel in arks (i.e. the planets)<sup>11</sup> and had acquired knowledge of their speech, for all the stars talk in Mandaean. (Each star is far from the other and has a great world attached to it. But one star sees its fellows from afar off, perfectly, and they talk, one with another, through space.<sup>12</sup> . . .)

8. The strange tribe said to the darawish, “Teach us your knowledge, or we shall kill you!”

9. They denied the possession of knowledge.

10. The people and their leader rose and made a huge fire and said, “Bring them here and throw them on the fire!”

11. They threw them on the fire, but the darawish began to walk about in the fire and were not burnt. Then they threw more of them into the fire, but they did not burn: they walked in the fire.<sup>13</sup>

12. The leader gazed, and he thought he saw a light descending from the sky which turned about each one of them, so that the fire could not touch them; and a radiance shone about them. These men could not be killed for their power was from God. Qiqel smiled at their king from the midst of the fire.

8. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

9. Abraham had lived in all three places.

10. Plural form of *darwish*.

11. In ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, the gods are depicted seated in celestial boats.

12. Cf. Abraham 3:1–18.

13. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.