

detailed report: and the latter's reply of 29.4.1627 begins by explaining that he had been awaiting the arrival of the Vicar Provincial in order to set out for the town of Hawaizeh in Persian Khuzistan, where the 'Christians of S. John' had a larger centre than Basra

"and practise their ceremonies, and their great Shaikhs reside.

"Firstly. This race, named by us 'Christians of S. John' and among the Muslims "Subba', among themselves and in their own tongue is called 'Mandaea'. Their own language is Chaldaean, but corrupt or, indeed, just as Italian and Spanish are different tongues, and Castilian and Portuguese, so it may be with this one: I have caused real Chaldaeans to converse with these 'Christians of S. John', and they understood very little of one another: the characters somewhat resemble Chaldaean, but are different, and the names of the letters very different.

"The real Chaldaean . . . which we call vulgarly Syriac, with the characters of which I have some moderate acquaintance because of the constant need we have, when dealing with Christians here, seeing that with regard to Muslim Arabs, whose writing they do not understand, they employ the Arabic language but written in Chaldaean characters:¹ and they call this Gerkhuni" [*? sic*].

"These 'Christians of S. John' have a tradition that their own country lies towards Syria and Jerusalem, and they denominate it Jabal Akhdar, which signifies the green mountains, and they assert that still today some of the Mandaeans are dwelling there. . . ."

As to the allegations of previous travellers that this folk were Christians Fr. Basil was under no illusion and explained:

"For a long time past I have come to the conclusion that they have no" (Christian) baptism and consequently no sacrament: and I have tested this by talking with their priests and eliciting with great care the words they say when they perform that ceremony, which is nothing more than an ablution, a customary business in these parts. I have seen them baptize without any mode or form: and it was that which made me doubt first. . . . In Goa they" (i.e. the Portuguese, etc.) "baptize as many of them as go to those parts, as everybody, generally speaking, regards their 'Christian' status with suspicion. . . . But, as now indeed it seems to me they are not Christians . . . I think they may be sprung of Christian ancestors . . . and they may have derived the name from such: they observe Sunday: they venerate the Cross. . . ."

What is historically important is a list of villages and townships the Mandaeans inhabited in 1625:

"They possess no country of their own, but live scattered in the surroundings under the dominion of the Muslims, partly those of the Shah, partly those of the Pasha of Basra. The place, where they are most in numbers . . . is Hawaizeh: the other places where they reside are the following" (the spelling of the names by the ear of Fr. Basil makes them often unrecognizable, or hardly so):

"Basra	Mishki
"Muhassanieh [<i>? sic</i> , Muhaisin, or Muhammareh]	Khairabad
"Kamalabad	Ja'farabad
"Seeitte [<i>? sic</i>]	Gasbian [<i>? sic</i>]
"Shatt-i-Jadid	Balangun [<i>? sic</i>]
"Gessari [<i>? sic</i> , Hisari]	Dilunak
"Buyani [<i>? sic</i>]	Mansurabad

¹ Just as the Jews of Salonica write and print Spanish in Hebrew characters.