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THE NAME ALLAH

by

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PREFACE

It is a little more than ten years since I made my first acquaintance, quite unintentionally, with members of the Moslem Community in South Africa. Their deeply religious way of life, their meticulous observance of religious precepts, and their arduous study of their Holy Book in the Arabic language, made me take a profound interest in the Koran, the centre of their faith. This event changed the course of my life. Through a fortunate combination of circumstances I had at the same time the privilege to begin my university career under Professor Adrianus van Selms, which led to the fact that I studied Hebrew and Arabic as major subjects already for my first degree. The keen interest of Professor van Selms (who suggested the theme for this dissertation) in my studies, has always been an inspiration and a stimulation to mine still deeper for the rich treasures of the Semitic languages. From him did I not only receive all my knowledge of Arabic, but he also shared with me his honest and respectful approach to the Islam. I deem it a great honour to have been able to finish this work under his competent guidance. I wish to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation towards him. It is my prayer that he will experience many years of good health in retirement to pursue his love for the Semitic languages.

I also remember dr. C.J. Labuschagne, presently of Groningen, who first introduced me to the grammar and literature of the Hebrew language. I wish to express my gratitude towards my friend and colleague Prof. W.C. van Wyk, for the interest he has taken in my work, for his many kindnesses and friendship and for his help to facilitate the completion of the present work, both as lecturer at the R.A.U. and as head of the Department of Semitic Languages at the University of Pretoria. I wish to thank my colleague Prof. H.S. Pelsler, chairman of the Department of Semitic Languages at the Rand Afrikaans University, for his warm friendship and complaisance over the past

six years. During these years I have learnt that his modesty hides a sound scholarship which is still to be appreciated in its full merit.

I mention in appreciation the teaching staff of the Faculty of Theology of the "Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk" of the University of Pretoria; especially Prof. H.D.A. du Toit who taught Missionary Science at the time, and Prof. J.H. Kritzinger and later Prof. A.H. van Zyl of the Department of Old Testament Studies.

Again I wish to thank the Rand Afrikaans University and Messrs. R. Sagov and D. Susman for a generous bursary which enabled me to visit the Hebrew University in Jerusalem at the beginning of the year and gave me the opportunity to acquaint myself with sources and research inaccessible in South Africa. In this respect I also thank the staff of the library of the Rand Afrikaans University.

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation towards my friends, the ministers of the Indian Reformed Church, particularly the Reverend Dr. C. du P. le Roux and the Reverend G.J.A. Lubbe for their encouragement and scientific interest in Islam.

It is a heart-felt desire to thank my parents who made many sacrifices to give me the advantage of a university education. My deepest appreciation goes to my wife, for years of blissful marriage and love. I thank her for loving inspiration and invaluable help in typing the unreadable manuscripts so accurately. I thank my little daughter for much patience and understanding when we were both occupied with the preparation of this work.

Finally and above all: Praise and honour and worship be to God, our heavenly Father, for from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AKM - Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes.
- ANET - J.B. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament<sup>2</sup>, 1959.
- ARW - Archiv für Religionswissenschaft.
- CIS - Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum.
- EI - The Encyclopaedia of Islam (old edition).
- ERE - J. Hastings, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.
- IC - Islamic Culture.
- JAOS - Journal of the American Oriental Society.
- JBL - Journal of Biblical Literature.
- JEOL - Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux.
- JJS - Journal of Jewish Studies.
- JNES - Journal of Near Eastern Studies.
- JSS - Journal of Semitic Studies.
- MW - The Muslim World.
- OLZ - Orientalistische Literaturzeitung.
- PRU - J. Nougayrol etc., Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit, 1955ff.
- ThW - G. Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament.
- TLZ - Theologische Literaturzeitung.
- UF - Ugarit-Forschungen.
- UM - C.H. Gordon, Ugaritic Manual, 1955.
- UT - C.H. Gordon, Ugaritic Textbook, 1965.
- VT - Vetus Testamentum.
- WM - H.W. Haussig, Wörterbuch der Mythologie, 1965.
- WZKM - Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes.
- ZA - Zeitschrift für Assyriologie.
- ZAW - Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.
- ZDMG - Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft
- ZDPV - Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins.

## CONCERNING THE TRANSCRIPTION

- a. What is given here, is the transcription of the Arabic alphabet in the sequence of that alphabet. The transcription resembles that of the EI. The first letter of the alphabet is usually not indicated in vocalized words.

'	d
b	t
ṭ	ʒ
<u>th</u>	c
<u>dj</u>	<u>gh</u>
ḥ	f
<u>kh</u>	q
d	k
<u>dh</u>	l
r	m
z	n
s	h
<u>sh</u>	w
ṣ	y

- b. When ', w and y are used as matres lectionis they are not indicated apart from the transcription of the vowel. Similarly w and y are represented by vowels when they are used in diphthongs.
- c. Vowels are transcribed as a, i, u. The matres lectionis (letters of elongation) are generally not indicated separately, but represented by a circumflex over the relevant vowels viz. â, î, and û. Where it was considered necessary to indicate a mater lectionis it is added one



space above the line, e.g. the y in Ismâ<sup>c</sup>î<sup>y</sup>l. No distinction is made between Alif maqsûra and Alif mamdûda.

- d. Hamzat al-Wasl is not indicated as such. The specialist will know where it must be applied in distinction from hamzat al-qat<sup>c</sup>.
- e. A letter with Tashdîd is represented by writing that letter twice. The assimilation of the definite article to the so-called sun-letters is not indicated. In combination with the previous rule we transcribe thus, e.g. bait al-radjul.
- f. Final vowels and nunation (Tanwîn) are generally not indicated. When it is indicated it is written above the line, e.g. al-bait<sup>u</sup>.
- g. The female ending of nouns is indicated with final -a (e.g. in kunya) in the absolute state, and with final -at if the word is in the construct state.
- h. Where it is suitable the same transcription is applied to the other Semitic languages. The expert reader will be able to determine the values of letters and vowels not contained in the list above by comparison with their untranscribed forms. This applies especially to vowels.
- i. In well-known words like Koran, Mohammed, etc., the common English spelling has been retained, instead of Qur'ân, Muhammad, etc. — objectionable as it may be from the viewpoint of the Arabist.

AFRIKAANSE OPSOMMING

Titel: "The name Allah".  
Outeur: Jacobus Adriaan Naudé.  
Promotor: Professor A. van Selms.  
Departement: Semitiese Tale.  
Graad: D. Litt.

Allâh is die naam van die God van die Koran en die Islam. In die Semitiese idioom verteenwoordig die naam van God die wesenlike aard van sy lewende natuur en manifesteer die totaliteit van sy goddelike persoon. Daarom is 'n ondersoek van die naam Allâh 'n bestudering van sy ganse wese.

Die naam Allâh kan etimologies verklaar word as van suiwer Arabiese oorsprong naamlik 'n kombinasie van die bepaalde lidwoord al met lâh, of die variante vorm ilâh, wat beteken "god". Die naam word in Sinai gevind waar dit in Nabatiese inskripsies uit die derde eeu v.C. gebruik is, maar waarskynlik kom die naam reeds voor in die Lihyâniese inskripsies wat terugdateer tot die vyfde eeu v.C. Die woord Allâh hou verband met die algemeen Semitiese Il/El met 'lh as tussenvorm. 'lh moet verklaar word volgens die verskynsel van die "zweigipflige Akzent" in ou Suid-Arabies.

Die Ugaritiese tekste en die Noord- en Suid-Arabiese materiaal is eenstemmig dat Il die belangrikste god in die onderskeie pantheons was maar dat hy, as gevolg van

sy ouderdom, vervang is deur ander gode. Die Arabiese teofore name gee ook aandag aan die verhouding tussen god en mens. Die Arabiese poësie weerspieël die uiterste dekadensie van die heidendom kort voor die koms van die Islam. Dit verbind Allâh met die Ka<sup>c</sup>ba. Moslem outeurs het vanouds suggereer dat die Nabatiese Quraish Allâh uit die Noorde na Mekka gebring het. Die gebruik van die naam Allâh deur die Jode, Christene en Hanîfs het daaraan 'n uitsluitlik monoteïstiese konnotasie gegee, wat in die prediking van Mohammed voortgesit sou word. Volgens die Koran het die heidense Arabiere Allâh as 'n veraf ontoeganklike Oppergod beskou. Daarom het hulle afgode as middelaars benodig. Mohammed het daarop aanspraak gemaak dat hy net die Arabiese godsdiens reformeer tot sy oorspronklike suiwer vorm.

Ooreenkomstig Joodse gebruik het Mohammed die uitspraak van die eienaam van sy God aan die begin van sy loopbaan vermy, in die besonder gedurende die eerste Mekkaanse tydperk. Die Koran argumenteer nie om die bestaan van Allâh te bewys nie. Die teenwoordigheid van die lewende God in hierdie wêreld word konkreet uitgedruk in antropomorfe taal. Dit doen nie afbreuk aan 'n verhewe geestelike verstaan van die transendente God nie. Die Koran beklemtoon dat Allâh verhewe is bo enige genealogiese bande. Mohammed het nooit die benaming ab, vader, vir Allâh gebruik nie en in hierdie opsig verskil sy prediking van die algemeen Semitiese begrip van 'l, 'lh.

Die aanbidding van valse gode, wat in alle opsigte die presies teenoorgestaldes van Allâh is, hou 'n

bedreiging vir die kosmiese wêreldorde in. Die engele is bloot die uitvoerders van God se handelinge met die mens. Satan verteenwoordig al die magte in opstand teen Allâh maar hy is volkome onderworpe aan Allâh wat die uiteindelijke outeur van al die kwaad is.

In sy handele met die mens openbaar Allâh homself as heilig, genadig en regverdig. Hy het die gelowige lief maar sy toorn ontvlam teen die ondankbare ongelowige.

Allâh se kennis is volmaak en hy gee die gelowige aandeel aan sy wysheid. Die spanning tussen die vrye wil van Allâh, wat alles bepaal, en die verantwoordelike vryheid van die menslike wil word in die Koran gehandhaaf. Allâh word dikwels beskrywe in terme van 'n aardse koning.

Allâh is nie absoluut transendent nie. Sy immanensie in hierdie wêreld word openbaar in sy skeppende handele en in sy handele met die mens. Die werklike instrument van die handele van Allâh is sy woord, waarvan die skepping die sigbare vormgewing en die Koran die kommunikatiewe aspek is. Die skepping getuig van die onontkombare mag en die onvergelykheid van Allâh. Die mens behoort hom in aanbidding tot Allâh te wend met dankbaarheid vir al die gawes van die skepping. Allâh het die mens as plaasvervanger op aarde aangestel, om hom te dien en prys. Vir die gelowige is Allâh kosbaarder as sy familie, sy besittings, en selfs sy lewe. Die mens moet die lesse van die geskiedenis leer want daarin word die handele van Allâh met die mens demonstree. Die mens moet Allâh in 'n ritueel rein toestand aanbid deur

sy naam in die salât te vermeld en deur aalmoese te gee. Allâh ontvang nie die vlees en bloed van offers nie, maar die toewyding van die gelowige. Die sentrale plek van die Ka<sup>c</sup>ba, die "huis van Allâh", word in die Koran gehandhaaf. Verdienstelike werke word aangeneem ter versoening van sondes, maar die Koran beklemtoon die noodsaaklikheid van bekering. Op die Oordeelsdag sal alle skepsele voor Allâh, die regverdige regter, verskyn wat sal regeer in onbetwiste majesteit.

Daar is nie 'n evolusie in Mohammed se Gods-begrip nie. In die latere kalâm van die Islam is die Koraniese begrip van Allâh vereng om uiteindelik op te gaan in die van 'n filosofiese Absolute Wese.

Allâh was besig om in die vergetelheid te versink maar deur die prediking van Mohammed is sy posisie herstel. Die Koraniese Godsbegrip is wesenlik dieselfde as dié van die Ou Testament. Die geheelbeeld word nie deur die etiese leer van God se streng geregtigheid bepaal nie, maar deur die onontkombare, onbeperkte vrye mag van die Skepper met die onafskeidbare en logiese komplement dat Allâh die enigste God is — tot how moet die mens in dankbaarheid keer.

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Title: The name Allah.  
Author: Jacobus Adriaan Naudé.  
Promoter: Professor A. van Selms.  
Department: Semitic Languages.  
Degree: D. Litt.

Allâh is the name of the God of the Koran and of Islam. In Semitic idiom the name of God represents the essential nature of his living being and manifests the totality of his divine person. Therefore an investigation into the name Allâh is a study of his person.

The name Allâh can etymologically be explained as of pure Arabic origin viz. a combination of the definite article al with lâh, or its variant ilâh, meaning "god". The name is found on Sinai in Nabataean inscriptions from the third century B.C., but probably the name already occurs in the Lihyânic inscriptions dating back to the fifth century B.C. The word Allâh is related to the common Semitic Il/El of which the intermediate 'lh is an extension to be explained after the phenomenon of the "zweigipflige Akzent" in ancient South Arabian.

The Ugaritic texts and the North and South Arabian material agree that Il was the most important god in their pantheons but that, because of his age he came to be

replaced by other gods. The Arabian theoforic names also give attention to the relationship between god and man. Arabic poetry reflects the extreme decadence of paganism shortly before the advent of Islam. It connects Allâh with the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba. Ancient Moslem authors suggest that the Nabataean Quraish introduced Allâh from the North into Mecca. Using the name Allâh, Jews, Christians and Hanîfs gave it an exclusive monotheistic connotation to be continued in the preaching of Mohammed. According to the Koran the pagan Arabs experienced Allâh as some distant unapproachable supreme God. Therefore they needed their idols as intercessors. Mohammed claimed that he was only restoring the Arab religion to its original pure form.

After the example of Jewish custom Mohammed avoided pronouncing the proper name of his God at the beginning of his career, particularly during the first Meccan period. The Koran does not argue to prove the existence of Allâh. The presence of the living God in this world is concretely expressed in anthropomorphic language. This does not impair a highly spiritual understanding of the transcendent God. The Koran emphasized that Allâh is exalted above any genealogical ties. Mohammed never applied the title ab, father, to Allâh and in this respect his preaching differs from the common designation of 'l, 'lh.

The worship of false gods, who are in all respects the exact opposites of Allâh, constitutes a threat to the cosmic order of the universe. The angels are merely

the enactors of God's dealings with man. Satan represents all powers in revolt against Allâh, but he is completely subjected to Allâh who is the ultimate author of all evil.

In his action towards man Allâh reveals himself as holy, merciful and just. He loves the believer but his wrath inflames against the ungrateful disbeliever. Allâh's knowledge is perfect and he shares his wisdom with the believer. The tension between the free will of Allâh that determines everything, and the responsible freedom of the human will, is preserved in the Koran. Allâh is often described in terms of an earthly king.

Allâh is not absolutely transcendent. His immanence in this world is revealed in his creative action and his dealings with man. The real instrument of Allâh's action is his word, of which the creation is the visual configuration and of which the Koran is the verbal aspect. Creation bears witness to Allâh's inescapable power and his incomparability. Man should turn in grateful worship to Allâh on account of the benefits of creation. Allâh appointed man as viceroy on earth to serve and praise him. The believer holds Allâh dearer than his family, his possessions, and even his life. Man should learn the lessons of history for in them Allâh's action towards man is demonstrated. Man should worship Allâh in a ritually pure state by mentioning his name in the salât and by giving alms. Allâh does not receive the flesh and blood of sacrifices, but the devotion of the



believer. The central position of the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba, the "house of Allâh", is maintained in the Koran. Meritorious deeds are accepted in expiation of sin but the Koran stresses the necessity of repentance. On the Day of Judgement all creation will appear before Allâh the just Judge who will rule in unrivalled majesty.

There is no evolution in Mohammed's concept of Allâh. In later Islamic kalâm the Koranic concept of Allâh was narrowed to be finally lost in that of a philosophical Absolute Being.

Allâh was sliding back into oblivion but was restored by the preaching of Mohammed. His concept of God is essentially that of the Old Testament. The total image is dominated not by the ethical doctrine of God's stern justice, but by the inescapable, unlimited free power of the Creator, with the inseparable and logical complement that Allâh is the only God — to him man should turn in thankfulness.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

قال : وَيْلَكُمْ لَا تَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا  
فَيُصْحِتَكُمْ بِعَذَابٍ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ آفَتَرَى .

A dark green is the favourite colour amongst pious Moslems: One may find it used by the orchestra marching through the streets during religious celebrations; it is the background-colour of the crescent and the star on Moslem flags; one may find it the colour of the domed roof of the mosque, in beautiful contrast with its whitepainted walls; and in the Old City of Jerusalem one may read the name Allâh painted in green on the door of a house, to ward off evil spirits. Green is said to be the colour of Allâh<sup>1)</sup>. It is a visual reminder of the everlasting, all-embracing presence of God. From the top of the minaret the name Allâh reverberates five times a day in the ears of believer and unbeliever alike and no other name is formed as frequently on the lips of the Arab.

#### A. Historical perspective.

The aim of this study is to examine the meaning and contents of this name as it is portrayed in the Koran. Surprisingly little attention has been given to this

subject as yet. In 1779 one Haller wrote his Lehre von Gott aus dem Koran gezogen and it seems that a certain Dettinger dealt with the subject in his Beiträge zu einer Theologie des Korans, 1831. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the publication of The Moslem Doctrine of God (1905) by S.M. Zwemer and a booklet The Muslim Idea of God (1909) by W.H.T. Gairdner. Both works are extremely polemic and apologetic in character and the latter hardly deserves mentioning. Since then no monograph appeared on the subject to the best knowledge of the present writer. Its treatment is commonly restricted to haphazard articles in encyclopaedias where the focal point is the various interpretations of the Kalâm. Elsewhere it is hidden in a few pages of works introducing Moslem theology or in biographies of the prophet Mohammed. A scientific treatment from Moslem side is still to be written. In 1948 Nashwân ibn Sa'id al-Himyarî published an Arabic work in rhymed prose on the uselessness of striving for a conception of the nature of God. Daud Rahbar, in his dissertation<sup>2)</sup>, was justified in his observation that no scientific answer has so far been given to the question concerning the Koran's conception of God. Originally intent on writing a history of the first nine centuries of Moslem Ethical Thought, Rahbar finally reverted to the Koran itself to search for the dominant note of the Koran's doctrine of Allâh. He found it to be the ethical doctrine of God's stern justice.

H. Kraemer drew attention to a new way of

rethinking old values in modern Islam, brought about by its confrontation with the Western philosophy and way of life, teeming with inventivity and restless activity<sup>3)</sup>. One line of thought frequently recurring is that the rigidity of the Islam is the result of a wrong interpretation of its basic principles and especially of the Koran. A correct reinterpretation of the Koran would show it the source of all modern ideals and thoughts<sup>4)</sup>. Thus the Koran and its interpretation are again important instruments in the self-revision and reformulation of Islam. Exegesis on a scientific basis by a Moslem is encountered for the first time in Rahbar's work. Should it gain wide acceptance it holds much promise. It is our conviction that the gulf between the ahl al-kitâb and Moslems can best be bridged where later dogmatic judgments and prejudices are precluded. Christians can best understand the Koran and its significance where exegesis is nothing more than a reformulation, a translation of the meaning of the Koran in the idiom of our time, because the apostolic service of Mohammed existed only in the "tradition"<sup>5)</sup> of the words and deeds of God, as clear or as indistinct as he received it himself.

#### B. The design of the study.

The purpose of this study is an honest attempt to listen to and to understand the text of the Koran, based on principles of sound exegesis. Since Allâh was the centre of the preaching of the Prophet, the theme of our study forced us inevitably and involuntarily in the direction of

presenting an outline of Koranic theology. (It should nevertheless be clearly understood that it has not been our intention to write a theology of the Koran; such an undertaking would exceed the proper limits of the present study.) We attempted to listen to the message of the Koran itself, searching for the meaning of an âya in the context, avoiding the traditional interpretations of the tafsîr on purpose<sup>6)</sup>. Even the meanings of words were determined by their contextual usage and comparative Semitic philology, rather than by the dictionaries — for the traditional interpretation exercised an influence on the subsequent meanings of words too often accepted at face value in the study of the Koran.

Furthermore the Koran is repeatedly interpreted against its Judaeo-Christian and pagan Arab background. We consider it wrong to doubt the genuineness of Mohammed's experience of his calling as a prophet. We also do not belong to those happy people who search endlessly for sources from which Mohammed could have copied his sayings and deny him all originality. In the course of our study we came under the impression of the close proximity in religious thought between the Koran and the Old Testament. (We take this opportunity to express our indebtedness to the results of the scientific study of the Old Testament.) The Koran itself claims to be a continuation of Jewish and Christian faith<sup>7)</sup>. Consequently we quote biblical and other material only to gain a better understanding of the Koran. In fact we deem it rather difficult for somebody who has no knowledge of the religions which

existed at the time in Arabia to understand the full import Mohammed's preaching must have had on his hearers. For the Koran is only seemingly (and at that quite deceptively) simple and boringly repetitious — systematic study turns it into a most fascinating document of faith. We may add that we had neither intentional bias nor polemic or apologetic purposes with the compilation of the present work.

This general introduction is followed by a phenomenological survey of the Semitic concept of a proper

name and its significance. Special reference is made to Arab nomenclature. This chapter not only justifies the contents of this work to sail under the flag of its title, but it also illustrates that the name Allâh is never a meaningless instrument of reference. The mention of the name Allâh brings with it an immediate experience of his presence and his action in this world. The importance of the etymological meaning of names made such an investigation of the name Allâh necessary and showed the relationship between Allâh and the Semitic god Il/El. Since Mohammed clearly stated that Allâh was worshipped by other peoples long before his own mission to the Arabs, and that he was proclaiming the same message to his own people, we were compelled to review Allâh before the advent of the Islam; however meagre our information may be. Particularly regrettable is the political situation in Arabia, which never favoured a proper and unhindered scientific expedition to retrieve the wealth of inscription and other material buried in the

deserts<sup>8)</sup>. Furthermore not all the available inscriptional material has been published as yet and much work remains to be done in the fields of interpretation and systematization. The present study is concluded by a few remarks on the concept of Allâh in early theological controversies and developments of the Islam. This is followed by a synopsis of the conclusions reached.

We do not pretend to have spoken the last word on the person of Allâh and more particularly the Koranic doctrine of Allâh. Man will never be able to catch the living God in fallible words or dogmas. In this respect we share the sentiments of Jerome: 'Remote as we are from perfect knowledge, we deem it less blameworthy to say too little rather than nothing at all'<sup>9)</sup>. L. Gardet referred to the difficulty to classify and pick out the themes concerning God, without a risk of breaking the very rhythm of sûras and verses<sup>10)</sup>. In addition it should be noted that the attributes of Allâh are revealed in his action towards man with the result that the distinctions made in chapter five should not be taken as separations or dissociations. Every subject should be read in the context of the whole.

It is our hope that this study may be a humble contribution to the renewed interest of Moslems in the Koran and Koranic interpretation. It is an interest we hope will also be shared by Christians who care for the salvation of these people.

C. The text of the Koran.

The only authentic source for a study of Mohammed's concept of Allâh is the Koran<sup>11)</sup>. Modern study has not raised any serious question regarding the authenticity of the Koran. It is clear that charges of mutilation by the Shî<sup>c</sup>a, or other religious groups, are founded on dogmatic assumptions. The text on which the present study is based, is the textus receptus of the standard Egyptian edition. Where the verse-numbering of Flügel's edition (which has been generally used in the West until recently) differs from it, Flügel's numbering is indicated in parenthesis.

As far as extra-<sup>c</sup>Uthmânic codices are concerned our sources indicate that there were indeed variations in reading. The variant readings chiefly affect the vowels and punctuation due to initial deficiencies of the Arabic script; but occasionally there is a different consonantal text<sup>12)</sup>. It is imperative to understand that the value of the variant readings to establish an original text of the Koran is practically negligible<sup>13)</sup>. Even a cursory perusal of the material reveals that it is almost always of a secondary nature, when tested by the rules of textual criticism. Thus it consists of glosses, of attempts to remove theologically unacceptable sayings, or of efforts to correct the grammar or punctuation of the Koranic text. One relevant example will suffice: In Sûra XXIX, 2(1)f. it is implied that God's knowledge is imperfect since he has to test man "in order to



know" who are the liars. This was found objectionable and consequently the repeated falaya<sup>c</sup>lamanna was changed to falayu<sup>c</sup>limanna with the result that according to the variant reading Allâh will "make known" who is a liar and who not. It is therefore sound scholarship which induced Ignaz Goldziher to treat textual variants as the first step of Koranic exegesis in his study Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung<sup>14)</sup>. With regard to the subject of the present study this writer is aware of only one instance where the textus receptus seems to be secondary: The learned of Kûfa and also <sup>c</sup>Abdullâh ibn Mas<sup>c</sup>ûd read <sup>c</sup>adjibtu instead of the <sup>c</sup>adjibta of the vulgate in Sûra XXXVI, 12. It would seem that the vulgate accepted the latter reading to avoid Allâh as the subject of a verb of amazement.

#### D. The orthography of the Koran.

The attentive reader would have noticed an incongruity between the spelling of the name Allâh on the cover and title-page, and its spelling in the corpus of this study. The spelling Allah (with a short a in the second syllable) in the title is our only concession to the pronunciation of the name in the mouth of the Prophet himself, just as he said qurân and not qur'ân<sup>un</sup>. To understand the Koran philologically and, in some instances, to understand the rhyme, it is necessary to present here a short review of this matter.

Mohammed spoke a Meccan dialect which deviated in many forms from the poetic koinē. Whether the language of the Koran is the Meccan dialect, slightly adapted to the poetic idiom (Brockelmann), or the poetic koinē itself, with unconscious backsliding into the Meccan dialect<sup>15)</sup>, it is clear that the incongruities between the consonants on the one hand and the vowels and the other punctuation marks on the other, are due to dialectic differences<sup>16)</sup>.

The scholars of Kûfa and Basra conformed the fixed consonantal text of the Koran to the, in their opinion, perfect language of the poets by introducing special extra-consonantal signs. This was the only alternative since the consonantal text was considered as holy and could not be tampered with. The result was that this orthography which was invented especially for the Koran became a whole orthographical system in which the dualism between the k<sup>e</sup>tîb of the consonants and the q<sup>e</sup>rê of the external signs was retained. After the example of the Koran it subsequently became the standard orthography for Arabic.

The position can be best explained by means of a few examples. The Meccan dialect apparently gave preference to forms which words were known to have in poetry only in the pausal<sup>17)</sup> position. In this way the tâ' marbûta can be explained: In Mecca feminine words were pronounced with a final -t only in the construct state (as in Hebrew); in the absolute state the termination was -ah. In the language of the poets the t was retained in the absolute

state as well by an -atun ending (for un see below). To change the final Meccan -ah, written in the consonantal text of the Koran, into the t-sound demanded by the poetic language, the two diacritical dots of the third letter of the Arabic alphabet (the tâ') were added to the hâ', and pronounced as the tâ'<sup>18</sup>). Definite proof that the tâ' marbûta of the Koran was pronounced hâ' in the absolute state, is furnished by Sûra CIV, where we get a consistent assonance only if tâ' marbûta is pronounced as hâ'.

In the Meccan dialect the accent on words was different. Thus they said ilah, which was pronounced by the poets as ilâh, according to the metre of their verses. To adapt the consonantal text to the poetic koinê, the alif-of-elongation (which could not be inserted in the consonantal text) was externally added in reduced size to the lam: Meccan إِلَهِ became إِلَّهِ (for poetic إِلَهِ)<sup>19</sup>). Flügel went one step further and inserted this external alif in the consonantal text of his edition of the text of the Koran, to establish a "correct" text. Similarly the Meccan Allah became Allâh in the textus receptus as a q<sup>e</sup>rê perpetuum.

Other important innovations to the Meccan consonantal text were the hamza and nunation, both of which had been eliminated in the Meccan dialect<sup>20</sup>).

Please note:

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the notes to all chapters were put together in a separate volume. It is imperative to read the text in conjunction with the notes. A separate bibliography is not supplied, since it can be readily found in the notes. It has not been our intention to supply a complete bibliography on every subsection. As a general rule the author mentioned only works which he could obtain and to which he is indebted. Mention should here be made of G. Flügel's Concordantiae Corani Arabicae, 1842.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NAMES IN THE SEMITIC WORLD

A. The special importance attached to names in the Semitic world, with special reference to the Arabs.

1. The identity between name and substance:

Ancient man experienced a reality in the spoken word, which is unknown to the modern man accustomed to reason in abstract terminologies. To the Semite the spoken word and the object indicated by that word was identical<sup>1)</sup>, and still is to this day.

This identity between a name and the substance of the object indicated by it, is also true of proper names. In Egypt<sup>2)</sup> and Mesopotamia the mere pronouncement of a new name was already an act of creation<sup>3)</sup>. At Sakkara in Egypt the remains of clay figurines bearing the names of enemies were found. The common practice was to break these figurines into pieces in order to destroy the name of the enemy in a tangible way and thereby destroying the enemy himself<sup>4)</sup>. Similarly the writer of the book of Proverbs, when he had to describe the end of the wicked, used the awe-inspiring expression: "The name of the wicked shall perish"<sup>5)</sup>. The Old Testament evidence indicates that the eradication of a name is the strongest expression of annihilation since it implies complete annihilation. This is the main theme of the

fictitious complaint the woman from Tekoa laid before king David that her husband's family are intent to wipe his name and remnant from the face of the earth<sup>6)</sup>.

The Egyptian practice to destroy an enemy by destroying a clay figurine bearing his name has its equivalent in the Arab world: A mask of the enemy's face is made from gypsum, verses 30-33 of Sûra V is written on the face and the enemy's name on the back. Then a dagger is pierced into the head where the name is written, accompanied by the formula "Oh angels of Allâh, do the same to this person", and the enemy will drop dead<sup>7)</sup>. (It is therefore dangerous if the enemy knows your name<sup>8)</sup>.) The same principle motivates the Jewish prohibition, which has its parallels in Moslem and Coptic customs, to destroy any piece of paper on which the name of God is written<sup>9)</sup>. It is a matter of common knowledge that worn copies of the Koran that can no longer be used, are buried in the Moslem cemetery.

True to the common conviction the Arabs believe that a boy with the name "Little donkey" cannot be blamed if he acts as stupid as an ass<sup>10)</sup>. In the hope that a change of name will also change the substance of the matter, the victim of a snake is called "the sound one", and a lion not by its real name but for example "Jackal". The old Arabs loved to call their children after abominable animals and thorny, bitter plants. In this way they wanted to ensure that their child would not be hurt for: "Der schöne Name lockt an, der abschreckende feigt den Träger und ist ihm ein Panzer; man

will lieber dornig sein, als von den Ziegen gefressen werden"<sup>11)</sup>. The Arabs do not love to receive flora like the quince, jasmine or lily. Although in itself useful, pretty and even harmless, they are "Dingen in deren geschonkweiser Darbietung die Feinsinnigen ein böses Omen sehen und die sie wegen der Hässlichkeit ihrer Namen nicht mögen"<sup>12)</sup>. On the other hand they love to receive pomegranates, lotusfruit, roses, violets and peaches because they discover in the names thereof favourable omens<sup>13)</sup>.

## 2. Names of repute and disrepute:

With the advent of Islam this special significance attached to proper names was underlined. The names of two rival prophets of Mohammed were changed into their corresponding hypocoristic forms, to humiliate them and make them despicable. Thus the names Maslama and Talha<sup>14)</sup> became Musailima and Tulaiha respectively. The hated uncle and enemy of Mohammed is derisively called Abû Lahab, "father of the fire of hell"<sup>15)</sup> in the Koran and by Moslems. His real name was <sup>c</sup>Abd al-<sup>c</sup>Uzzâ ibn <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Mu<sup>tt</sup>alib. According to Sûra XLIX, 11 it is forbidden that believers should give each other insulting nicknames. On the other hand Arabs of all times considered it a token of friendship and estimation to call a person by his kunya<sup>16)</sup>. Both Caliphs Ma'mûn and Al-Wâthiq used to call the singer Ishâq ibn Ibrâhîm al-Mausilî by his kunya, Abû Muhammad, to honour him<sup>17)</sup> — he was of Persian descent<sup>18)</sup>. The exaltedness of Allâh is repeatedly confirmed in the Koran by the diction that the most beautiful

names belong to him<sup>19)</sup>.

The prophet Mohammed exercised great influence on the Moslem nomenclature. He purified names which could imply the recognition of idols. Thus he renamed <sup>c</sup>Abd Amr ibn <sup>c</sup>Auf, one of his first adherents, to <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmân ibn <sup>c</sup>Auf. Henceforth <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmân no longer replied when he was called <sup>c</sup>Abd Amr<sup>20)</sup>. His new name changed him into a new person<sup>21)</sup>.

In Al-Tibrîzî's collection of traditions, the Mishkât al-Masâbih<sup>22)</sup>, the following sayings of Mohammed were written down: "Do not call your servant Yasâr (Wealth), Rabâh (Profit), Nadjîh (Prosperous) or Aflah (Success). For you may ask if he is there when he is not and receive the negative reply, suggesting that the prosperity implied by such names is absent.

Call yourselves after the names of the prophets. The names dearest to Allâh are <sup>c</sup>Abd Allâh (Servant of Allâh), <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmân (Servant of al-Rahmân). The second best names are Hârith (Ploughman)<sup>23)</sup> and Humâm (Noble). The worst names are Harb (Enemy) and Murra (Bitterness)".

According to Muslim, one of the six great compilers of the traditions of Islam, Mohammed prohibited the use of the title Rabb for a human being because it is a name of Allâh in the Koran. It is also inadmissible to call



a slave Abd, because this word may only be used to express the relation of man towards Allâh<sup>24</sup>). From the advent of Islam onwards it is conspicuous that we always encounter the same names amongst Moslems, according to these principles stipulated by the Tradition<sup>25</sup>). All these data equivocally stress the particular value the Arabs<sup>26</sup>) both before and after the advent of Islam attached to the name of a person, namely that the etymological or lexical meaning of a name is an important factor creating the character of the bearer of that name or determining the events of life. This principle reminds one of the Old Testament where the etymology of a name is often added in the text<sup>27</sup>). In the Babylonian creation epic the gods called out the fifty names of Marduk with an explanation of its meaning after each name<sup>28</sup>).

### 3. Names of association:

Often the significance of a name is not its etymological or lexical contents, but the associations that name recalls, be it the circumstances at the birth<sup>29</sup>) or the prestige given to the name by people who had it in the past. This is the reason why names like Ibrâhîm and Mohammed became popular only after the Islam. A kunya was also often inherited together with a name because the particular kunya used to be associated with that name. The kunya of an Ibrâhîm is usually Abû Ishâq and according to Tradition Mohammed explained the fact that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is called "sister of Hârûn" in the Koran (XIX, 28(29) ) in a similar way<sup>30</sup>).

Amongst the Arabs it was common practice to

identify a person by using in addition to his proper name also his kunya (usually formed with the name of his son), the name of his tribe and the name of his birthplace.

The tribal name originated with a forefather whose name was so great that it put its stamp on all the generations after him. The fame and esteem of an individual rest not so much in his own excellencies but in the nobility of his ancestors. The more famous members of his family tree he can name, the greater is his own prestige<sup>31)</sup>. In his blood pulsates the virtues he physically inherited from his forefathers<sup>32)</sup>. Even to the present day it is not uncommon that the Arab nomad can name his ancestors as far back as ten to fifteen generations (i.e. over a few hundred years) without being able to say how old he is<sup>33)</sup>. Against this background it is clear why the genealogy of Mohammed<sup>34)</sup> is traced back to Ishmael and Abraham. Ishmael is venerated in the Koran as apostle and prophet, as builder of the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba and as the son who had an intimate relationship with his father Abraham. Abraham is praised in the Koran as the eminent prophet who (like Mohammed) came in revolt against the polytheism of his people, who was neither a Jew nor a Christian, who called the believers Moslems and who was the friend of God<sup>35)</sup>.

#### 4. The name and death:

Joh. Pedersen referred to the avidity with which Babylonian and Assyrian kings erected inscriptions to

promulgate their deeds: "They would make sure that their renown, their name in all its real greatness, should live and act for ever"<sup>36)</sup>. In this context he also refers to the use of tombstones to perpetuate the name of the deceased and thereby to immortalize the dead person himself (compare Genesis 35:20). Although the prophet Mohammed was firmly against the veneration of the dead and the erection of tombstones<sup>37)</sup>, the latter custom especially gained wide acceptance amongst Moslems. On such tombstones, which at times became an entire mausoleum, the name of the deceased was engraved together with verses from the Koran<sup>38)</sup>. There is indirect evidence that the kunya played an important part at the burial ceremony, which was the task of the eldest son<sup>39)</sup>. The purposeful application of the name to the tombstone or its use at the memorial<sup>40)</sup> of the dead to ensure the continued existence of the deceased needs further investigation. However this may be, it is an ancient Hebrew custom to continue a strong element of the name of the father in the name of the son<sup>41)</sup>. Especially a posthume son received the patronymic so that it lives on in him<sup>42)</sup>. If a man died in Israel without having a son the perpetuation of his name was ensured by means of the Levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:6f.).

##### 5. Names of places:

During the most important crisis of his career, the preparation for the battle of Badr, Mohammed was guided, just as on other occasions, by the names of places en route<sup>43)</sup>. A place-name with an inauspicious meaning dis-

qualified the route on which it was situated.

In the conversion of heathen traditions after the advent of the Islam a number of pseudo-saints originated in the course of time as old sanctuaries did not disappear, but was linked with a fictitious person whose name resembled that of the sanctuary. Under the cloak of the grave of a saint the cult was then continued. Thus we find in <sup>C</sup>Akka the tomb of the prophet <sup>C</sup>Akk who was, according to tradition, the founder of the city<sup>44)</sup>. This situation was possible only because of a certain identity in the eyes of the Semite between a country or place and a person or people of the same name. The South Arabian inscriptions furnished further examples of this identity<sup>45)</sup>. This identity is also illustrated by the usage of names like Israel, Ephraim, Amalek, Edom, Moab and Ammon in the Old Testament<sup>46)</sup> as well as in the indication of the place of origin contained in almost every Arab proper name. Some Arab authors are in fact known only by the name of their hometown or homecountry. This is the case with al-Bukhârî the great traditionist of the Islam. Caliph Umar complained that the Arabs of Iraq no longer name themselves after their ancestors, but after their towns<sup>47)</sup>. This inextricable relationship between a place and a person is seemingly also the reason for the Koranic prohibition to demolish a building in which the name Allâh is often mentioned, XXII, 40(41).

#### 6. Aspects of the Koranic usage of names:

We indicated that the name of a person can in

various ways determine his character. We read in the Koran that the wife of <sup>c</sup>Imrân, when she gave against her expectations birth to a daughter and not a boy, acknowledged her feminity by giving her a woman's name, Maryam. Similarly the disbelievers call the angels by names of women, indicating that they believe the angels to be feminine in gender<sup>48)</sup>. Mohammed challenged the idol-worshippers to mention the names of their idols, in other words to prove the existence of their gods<sup>49)</sup>.

Contrary to the determining function of names, Mohammed taught that there can also be false names, empty names without any reality. These names, which are nothing more than mere names, are the names with which the idolaters invoke their nonexistent gods. These names are false and without contents because Allâh did not authorize them<sup>50)</sup>. This new viewpoint of names without contents must be seen as a later development in support of monotheism and the negation of the false gods<sup>51)</sup>.

The Koranic verdict that Allâh has no namesake (Sûra XIX, 65(66) ) is nothing less than a proclamation that there is no god of the same being as Allâh. In the post-Koranic controversies we encounter the verdict: The written name of Allâh is Allâh<sup>52)</sup>.

The overwhelming evidence<sup>53)</sup> of the special significance of names in the Semitic world, confirms the expectation that also the names of gods are not merely a

means of distinction. It implies that every inquiry into the name Allâh is incomplete if it does not include an investigation into the nature of the God of the Koran.

B. The importance of knowing the name of the god.

1. The power of knowing a name:

In the Semitic world it was regarded as imperative to know the name of the god. A prayer can only be effective if the one who prays, knows the proper name of the god<sup>54)</sup>. For this reason the remark of Genesis 4:26 that men began to call upon the name Yahwè in the time of Seth, is not incidental. To us the difference between "LORD" and "God" may be insignificant, but to men of antiquity the knowledge of the name was the first requirement for any true communication<sup>55)</sup>. Knowledge of the proper name of the god gives the one who prays confidence<sup>56)</sup> since knowledge of the name gives the knower a certain power over the one who is known. A good example of this can be found in the old Greek epic the Odyssey where Homer described how one of the Cyclops, Polyphemus, tried to gain a hold upon Odyssey by asking him his name. The hero was prudent enough to furnish the pseudonym, "Nobody". Thus he frustrated Polyphemus' murderous plans and saved his own life and that of his men<sup>57)</sup>.

The power conferred by the knowledge of a name is frequently encountered in the Old Testament. After Jacob's nocturnal struggle with the 'ēlōhîm he asked his

opponent's name to get a certain hold on him<sup>58)</sup>, "the numen was to be held fast, for if one knew its name one could summon it, one could obligate it (by sacrifice, for example), one could even arbitrarily gesture, i.e., conjure with the divine power of this name"<sup>59)</sup>. This is certainly the clearest example, but the same idea is at the root of the analogous instance in Judges 13:17 and of Exodus 3:13 where Moses expects that the people will ask the name of the God who sent him. According to Psalm 91:14 Yahwè will protect the believer because he knows his Name<sup>60)</sup>. The prayer knows the name of God and this knowledge becomes an instrument by which God can be prompted to help<sup>61)</sup>. Israel's power is contained in his knowledge of the name of God. Others may trust in chariots and horses, but Israel is assured of a victory over his enemies because he knows and invokes the name of the LORD, Psalm 20:8. The power of the application of the proper name of God is very realistically illustrated in Psalm 118:10: "All nations surrounded me; it is with the name Yahwè I cut them off"<sup>62)</sup>. In the Koran (LXXXVII, 14f.) prosperity and success are promised to him who mentions the name of God in prayer. The name Allâh ensured a safe journey for Noah's ark (XI, 41(43)). In popular belief the mention of the name Allâh can deter the Angel of Death<sup>63)</sup>.

When the believer enters into relationship with his god he starts by pronouncing his name<sup>64)</sup>, and this ancient usage is continued in the liturgy of the Christian church under the form of the invocation. According to the great systematic theologian of the Islam, Fakhr al-Dîn al-

Râzî, who died in 1209 A.D., the formal confession of the Moslem faith can take place only through the proper name of his God, Allâh<sup>65)</sup>. Similarly when God takes the initiative of revealing himself he starts by uttering his name<sup>66)</sup>. The name of the god should be given as clear and as correct as possible in the prayer<sup>67)</sup> lest the prayer does not reach its destination, just as the pronunciation of the wrong name in a blessing causes a person for whom it was not destined to receive it. The prerequisite for every communication with the god is that man knows his name. If man does not know the name of the god he is exposed to an arcane will of which the limits are undefined. The conduct of this will is mysteriously incomprehensible and because he does not know its name he stands defenceless. If however he knows the name of the god, this god materializes in a person with whom he can come to an understanding, with whom he can traverse a history, and of whom he can even avail himself. The Israelites did not rest before they knew the proper name of their God. With him they traversed a history and from this history they could learn that he is Yahwe<sup>68)</sup>. On the other hand the god of the German poet Goethe could not reveal himself since he had no name<sup>69)</sup>.

## 2. Multinomial gods:

Like all beings the gods need names for their existence. In addition they have a multitude of nicknames or epithets, and the more they have of them, the more forms of appearance and power they possess. The names make their



way prosperous<sup>70)</sup>. It was also felt that one name can never comprise the full essence of the divinity. This is one reason why Moslems speak of ninety-nine names of God besides the name Allâh, each illuminating a different aspect of his character. It is interesting to note in this connection the special preference of the Koran to mention the divine attributes in pairs.

When a god wishes to prevent other gods, or men, from getting a hold on him, he keeps his most important name secret. A striking example comes from Egypt: The sungod Re had many names, but the big name which gave him power over men and gods was known only by himself. The goddess Isis planned to find out this name so that she may obtain the power for herself. She made a poisonous snake to bite him and Re could recover only if he reveals his secret name for "he whose name is mentioned, shall live"<sup>71)</sup>. On occasion the Egyptian god Osiris was threatened that his name would be called out aloud in the harbour of Busiris if he did not grant a request<sup>72)</sup>. In an Egyptian papyrus it was pointed out to the god Typhon that he was invoked by his correct names so that he could not refuse to hear the request<sup>73)</sup>. According to Tradition Allâh possesses a secret exalted name known only to a few individuals<sup>74)</sup>. All the wishes of him who invokes Allâh by this secret name will be fulfilled. Amongst the Egyptian Arabs the pronouncement of the exalted name of Allâh can kill the living, restore life to the dead and work many other miracles for him who knows this name<sup>75)</sup>.

Thus knowledge of the correct proper name of a god gives power — even magical powers.

3. Anonymous gods:

It is clear that the name of the god is of the utmost importance in the Semitic cult. Nevertheless we find "unknown gods" mentioned over the whole Near East. Thus the mention of ilu sha idū ū sha lā idū is frequent in Accadian texts. From the library of Assurbanipal (668-633 B.C.) we have, for example, a prayer in a Sumerian dialect with an interlinear Accadian translation in which the worshipper invokes the god and goddess he does not know<sup>76)</sup>.

The invocation of the "god of N.N." and similar appellations, without mention of the real name of the god was common in Arabia<sup>77)</sup>. In Palmyra the "unknown god" whose "name is blessed for ever" appears in inscriptions shortly after 100 A.D. This god is given the epithets "the kind one, the merciful, the rewarding one", and numerous altars are dedicated to him. He is the god who was approached in case of personal difficulties and his worship is rather different from that of the other cosmic and fertility gods whose cult beared a less individual character. Although this god later generally took the place of Ba<sup>c</sup>alshamīn in a triad with <sup>c</sup>Aglībōl and Malakbēl there are indications that the unknown god represents a certain spiritualising and monotheistic tendency (possibly under Jewish or Christian influence) in the religion of Palmyra<sup>78)</sup>. The sungoddess Shams

was anonymous in the old South Arabian state Saba' where she was merely indicated by the place of her first appearance or display of power as dhât himaim and dhât ba<sup>c</sup>dân<sup>79)</sup>.

Also in Qatabân this practice was followed and Werner Caskel regards such anonymity as a fundamental characteristic of old Arabian religion<sup>80)</sup>. Anonymity is found in South Arabia as well as in North Arabia and from the fifth century B.C. up to the advent of the Islam<sup>81)</sup>.

From the Hadîth we know the anonymous appellatives dhû al-khalasa and dhû al-sharâ<sup>82)</sup> indicative of the gods of local sanctuaries. The latter was the most important god of the Nabataeans and is known under the Greek form of this anonymous name, Dusares. In Hellenistic times Dusares was identified with the Greek god of wine Dionysus but originally Dusares had nothing to do with wine<sup>83)</sup>. The proper name of the god referred to as Dusares remains unknown.

Although the names Il/El and Ba<sup>c</sup>al have been used as proper names<sup>84)</sup>, they were at one stage employed as anonymous appellatives of local gods, like dhû. This explains names like Ba<sup>c</sup>al-P<sup>ec</sup>ôr, Ba<sup>c</sup>al-Melkart, Ba<sup>c</sup>al-B<sup>e</sup>rît, Ba<sup>c</sup>al-Biq<sup>c</sup>â as well as the combination of Il/Ilâh with placenames in Thamûdic<sup>85)</sup> texts of a particular period<sup>86)</sup>. Precisely because both El and Ba<sup>c</sup>al became anonymous epithets, they could replace one another. The same god, worshipped in Sichem, could now be called ba<sup>c</sup>al-b<sup>e</sup>rît (Judges 9:4) and then again ēl-b<sup>e</sup>rît (Judges 9:46).

The best known example from Greek literature is Acts 17:23 where the reference of the apostle Paul to the altar in Athens dedicated to "the unknown god" is written down. This reference finds its equivalent in Greek authors like Pausanias, Philostratus and Diogenes Laërtes. The Romans likewise distinguished between di certi and di incerti<sup>87)</sup> and in the Latin inscriptions we encounter the phrase sei deo sei deivae<sup>88)</sup>.

Wellhausen indicated that demons used to be anonymous in Arabian paganism, while names were most important to the gods since they were the foundation of the cult and a prerequisite for the dhikr, the tasbīh and tahlīl: "Der unbenannte Gott ist der unbekannte Gott, dem nicht gedient werden kann"<sup>89)</sup>.

How can the common phenomenon of the unknown god then be explained? Babylonian magic texts bear witness that the success of a ritual was not only dependent upon the correct procedure and the correct offerings, but also upon the invocation of the proper name of the god concerned<sup>90)</sup>. Unfortunately the priest did not always know which god (or demon) caused the misfortune or can relieve the distress of the stricken. The ingenious soon found a solution. By invoking a long list of gods he hoped to mention the correct name by chance so that the god concerned will be compelled to render help in accordance with the magic formula by which he is bound<sup>91)</sup>. To make completely sure that no god was passed over, he turned in any case to the "unknown god" and

the "unknown goddess"<sup>92)</sup>. The mention of the unknown god in the literature therefore does not contradict the importance of the knowledge of the proper name of the god. It is a measure of emergency which underlines the necessity of that knowledge.

It should be remembered that the "unknown god" here does not refer to some or other god in general, but to that specific god who is responsible for the particular fate of the prayer. Therefore it is logical that the unknown god in Palmyra bears an individual character and even received epithets like "kind" and "merciful". The individual character of gods who are indicated by combinations of dhû, dhât, ba<sup>c</sup>al or a form of ēl and a placename is selfevident. In Hellenistic times the combination dhû al-sharâ became a proper name in the form Dusares. El and Ba<sup>c</sup>al were proper names of individual gods over the whole Semitic world. It is interesting that the initial anonymous appellation ēl shaddai<sup>93)</sup>, chiefly used in Genesis, was later replaced with the proper name Yahwè, according to Exodus 6:2. Here the proper name of God became the possession of the people after further revelation. The tendency and aspiration is always to move from the unknown god to the known god. From the viewpoint of the history of religions this must be the normal course of events. This is probably the reason for the tendency in Palmyra to identify the "unknown god" with Ba<sup>c</sup>alshamîn. The ideal was to replace the anonymous appellative of a god with the proper name of the god for a knowledge of this name enables

communication with the god. This aim could be achieved by taking the anonymous appellative as the proper name; by replacing the anonymous appellative with a proper name; or by identifying the anonymous god with a known god. The latter process is analogous to the addition of the names of lesser gods in the form of epithets to another god. The name Allâh can be explained as an appellative (al-ilâh) which became a proper name.

#### 4. Avoidance of the name of a god:

Out of fear for irreverent misuse and profanation of the proper name of the God of Israel it was more and more replaced by anonymous names. This was particularly the case with the pronunciation of this proper name which fell into desuetude to such an extent that it was later for centuries wrongly read as Y<sup>e</sup>hōwâ until modern scholarship could establish the correct form Yahwè<sup>94)</sup>. The written tradition shows the same trend. It is conspicuous that the Habakkuk-pēshèr from Qumran avoided the tetragrammaton by using ēl instead<sup>95)</sup>. In the text of Habakkuk itself, as in various other texts from Qumran, the tetragrammaton was represented in the old Phoenician script<sup>96)</sup>. In the first Isaiah scroll from Qumran a<sup>a</sup>dōnai is used on occasion where the Masoretes read Yahwè and vice versa<sup>97)</sup>. From this scholars inferred that YHWH, whether it was written in Phoenician or in the square script, became a mere ideogram for a<sup>a</sup>dōnai<sup>98)</sup>. In the fragments of Aquila and Symmachus

found in the Cairo Geniza the proper name Yahwè was represented in the old Phoenician script in the midst of the Greek text. According to Origin the tetragrammaton occurred in the best copies of the Septuagint in the Hebrew script<sup>99)</sup>. Jerome informed us of the development as follows: "Quod quidam non intellegentes propter elementorum similitudinem, cum in Graecis libris reppererint,  $\pi\iota\pi\iota$  legere consueverunt"<sup>100)</sup>. Thus the proper name sank completely into oblivion<sup>101)</sup>.

The Koran warns against the abuse of the names of Allâh under threat of severe punishment, although it recommends the proper use of the most beautiful names of Allâh<sup>102)</sup>. As we will indicate in a subsequent chapter Mohammed himself initially avoided the proper name of his God and it has been suggested that the Arabic translation of the word Rahmân, viz. al-Rahîm was introduced into the basmala to prevent abuse of the former<sup>103)</sup>. The avoidance of the name Allâh is at the basis of the custom to cite the Koran, the ipsissima verba of Allâh, by the use of the verb qâla without any further ado<sup>104)</sup>. In Islamic mysticism the pronoun huwa is employed instead of the proper name Allâh. Religious scruple may be a reason why the names of gods so rarely appear in pagan Arab poetry. It is apparently also the reason for the circumlocution in the heathen formula: "by the one by whom I swear"<sup>105)</sup>.

In deference to Allâh this name is not pronounced in a latrine where only the personal pronoun is used to implore protection against the demons<sup>106)</sup>. In contrast the

pronunciation of the name Allâh at the hot springs of Tiberias is prohibited lest the demons are angered and refuse to grant healing of the illness<sup>107)</sup>.

5. Prevalent use of the name of the god:

Everyday life reflects no scruple or reserve to use the name Allâh<sup>108)</sup>. Musicians and singers of Egypt are usually loudly applauded with repeated outcries of "Allâh!"<sup>109)</sup>. Frivolous and licentious gossip are often accompanied by such outcries so that the uninformed will think that they make fun of religion<sup>110)</sup>. In many of their indecent songs the name Allâh recurs many times and A. Fischer could devote an article to offensive employment of the name Allâh by Arabs<sup>111)</sup>.

The Arab will undertake no task without feeling compelled to pronounce the name Allâh<sup>112)</sup>. The Koran itself sets the example by introducing every sûra (except IX) by the formula: "In the name of<sup>113)</sup> Allâh, the merciful, the beneficent". Accordingly this formula is also pronounced at the beginning of every meal although the Koran prescribes it only when animals are eaten<sup>114)</sup>.

The name Allâh is mostly used in everyday life in protection against the demons who try to harm man at every opportunity. Already in the Koran we read that the mention of the name Allâh calms the heart of man<sup>115)</sup>. The mention of the name Allâh is then recommended to the believer<sup>116)</sup>. The



mention of the name Allâh renders the demons powerless. When somebody opens a container in the kitchen, enters a dark room or a bath, says something harmful, falls, spills water, and so forth, the name Allâh is pronounced<sup>117)</sup>. To achieve the same results the names of God are worn on amulets and applied to the doors of shops and private homes<sup>118)</sup>. One of the first obligations after the birth of a child in Egypt is to whisper the adhân in the right ear of the baby<sup>119)</sup>. Thus it is ensured that the newly born will know the name Allâh and is protected against the djinn.

Although the Semitic language groups have much in common, the customs of one group are not necessarily exactly the same as that of another group. Every Semitic nation put his own stamp on the common heritage. This rule also applies to the different groups within the nation.

Therefore the pious Moslem will disapprove of some of the practices described in this chapter. Nevertheless nobody will contest the importance of knowing the proper name of God. Only a complete trust in and reliance upon the beneficial and protecting power of the name peculiar to God can explain its frequent use by Arabs. The knowledge of his name puts the omnipotence of Allâh at the disposal of those who surrendered to him. The ninety-nine "most beautiful names" had, next to the name Allâh, great significance in the religious life of Moslems through the ages to ennoble their lives and to improve their relationship with God. The full significance the name Allâh had for Mohammed will come to light in the course of this study<sup>120)</sup>.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD ALLĀH

#### A. The Arabic Side.

Gaining knowledge of the name of a god was for the Semite like passing from the darkness of misery and fear into the bright sunlight. The name identifies the character of his god. The etymology of the name Allāh could therefore be invaluable to determine the primitive conception of the god and possibly the place of origin of his cult. Unfortunately the etymology of the word Allāh is disputed<sup>1)</sup>.

#### 1. The fa<sup>cc</sup>āl formation:

It is interesting to note that quite a number of names or attributes applied to Allāh are of the formation fa<sup>cc</sup>āl which carries the basic idea of intensiveness or of habit. Nouns which indicate professions and trades usually adopt this form<sup>2)</sup>. In the Koran we have e.g. the roots fkhr, LV, 14(13); khlq, XV, 86; rzq, LI, 58; qhr, XII, 39; twb, II, 37(35); djbr, LIX, 23; ghfr, XXXVIII, 66; lm, V, 109(108); etc., applied to Allāh in the fa<sup>cc</sup>āl formation. The list can be lengthened especially with the addition of extra-Koranic names for Allāh like al-dayyān etc. The tendency to make foreign names resemble Arabic formations is well-known and is noticeable in the changes which a great

number of biblical names have undergone in the Koran<sup>3)</sup>. The name Allâh can therefore be regarded as a fa<sup>CC</sup>âl-formation of the root 'lh. In opposition to this solution it can be pointed out that the root is not foreign, but common Semitic (Ethiopic excluded) and that contrary to the previous examples the noun from the root 'lh probably preceded the verb which is denominative in this instance. Finally the Arabic orthography of Allâh does not agree exactly with the fa<sup>CC</sup>âl formation. We may rather suspect the reverse process viz. that attributes of Allâh were readily used after the fa<sup>CC</sup>âl pattern to resemble the name Allâh.

2. Allâh = al+ilâh:

Another solution, advocated by the school of al-Kûfa, is that Allâh<sup>u</sup> is a contraction of the definite article al- and the noun ilâh<sup>un</sup> commonly used in Arabic and meaning "god". The original form would be al-ilâh<sup>u</sup>. Then the vowel of the hamza was transferred to the l before it and the hamza was suppressed, so that alilâh<sup>u</sup> remained, originally written with alif of elongation in the consonants but henceforth indicating the long vowel externally by the perpendicular fatha resembling a small alif. The former l then lost its vowel and assimilated to the other, resulting in Allâh<sup>u</sup> 4).

Some support for this explanation can be found in Herodotus III, 8 where the Greek historian identified Urania with alilat<sup>5)</sup>. It seems that Herodotus knew the name

of the goddess Allât in the form alilat which form equals the Arabic al-ilât<sup>6)</sup>, meaning "the goddess". If Allât came from al-ilât it is evident that Allâh could also be derived from al-ilâh. Now the reading alilat in Herodotus III, 8 is not indisputable. The variant readings aliat<sup>7)</sup> and alital<sup>8)</sup> are attested and therefore demand caution in using alilat for the etymology of Allâh, even if they are not accepted<sup>9)</sup>. It is generally accepted that there is another reference to Allât in Herodotus I, 131 but the reading alilat here is a "correction" of the alitta of the transmitted text to bring this instance in agreement with Herodotus III, 8. The reading alitta is then regarded as a corruption of alilat under the influence of the preceding Mylitta. In his Life of St. Hilarion, chapter 25, Jerome refers to a temple of Venus at Elusa. F.V. Winnett<sup>10)</sup> reasoned that Elusa<sup>11)</sup> seems to be a transcription of the Arabic al-<sup>c</sup>Uzza, in this case a shortened form of something like Bait al-<sup>c</sup>Uzza. He then arrives at the conclusion that al-<sup>c</sup>Uzza must be identified with Venus in her morningstar aspect, which is in accordance with a statement of Theodolus, the son of Nilus, that the Arabs of Sinai worshipped the morning star. Herodotus I, 105 attested the antiquity of the worship of Venus saying that the temple of Aphrodite (i.e. Venus-Astarte) at Askelon was the oldest temple of this goddess. Winnett concludes that the alilat of Herodotus III, 8 is more likely "the goddess" al-<sup>c</sup>Uzza than Allât. The reading alitta in Herodotus I, 131 seems to support this interpretation for it "has a suspicious resemblance to the sound of al-<sup>c</sup>Uzza". Thus the evidence from Herodotus is not reliable enough to settle the etymology

of Allâh.

Short inscriptions of the fifth century B.C. found in a North-Arab shrine in Egypt, may provide evidence for deriving Allât from al-ilât. In these inscriptions, which were engraved on silver vessels, hn'lt (han-'ilât) was used to indicate the deity to which the votive offerings were directed. Of the three inscriptions published by I. Rabinowitz<sup>12)</sup> in 1956 the first contains only the word han-'ilât. From their names in the remaining two inscriptions it is clear that the donors were of Arab stock and probably have been settled in the vicinity of the Tell el-Maskhûta<sup>13)</sup> shrine for at least a generation. Now han- is a dialectical form of the definite article<sup>14)</sup> notably of the North-Arabian dialect Lihyânite<sup>15)</sup>. The word han-'ilât can therefore be translated as "the goddess". The language of these inscriptions however, is Aramaic as can be deduced from the relative pronoun zî<sup>y</sup> and the word bar. Rabinowitz argued that if an appellative were intended, it would certainly be expressed by the Aramaic 'lht', not by the Arabic, and therefore han-'ilât must be taken as a proper noun in these inscriptions, referring to the goddess worshipped in all parts of the pre-Islamic North-Arab world, viz. Allât. Against his assumption it may be said that anonymous names always refer to a specific god. Therefore this Arab tribe would be reluctant to change han-'ilât to Aramaic 'lht', especially in formulaic inscriptions referring to a deity; even though they may have been fully aware that it was not the proper name of the goddess, but merely an appellation. To change the name from han-ilât to

'lht' could imply that a different deity was invoked even if both words were known to be merely different dialectical forms of the same anonymous appellation meaning "the goddess". Besides it is known that Arabs using Aramaic in writing inscriptions were inclined to commit Arabisms. It is therefore not necessary to regard han-ilât as a proper name and a dialectical variant of Allât in these instances<sup>16)</sup>. If ever a tribe had good reason to spell the name of the goddess as han-Ilât, it was the Lihyânites. In about 400 inscriptions the majority of which contain almost exclusively names, including a few votive inscriptions, the word han-ilât is absent, though han-<sup>c</sup>Uzza is found<sup>17)</sup>. When the name of Allât does appear in Lihyânite it is already a proper name, spelt defectively Lt<sup>18)</sup>. To equate han-'ilât in these inscriptions with Allât is in view of the above not to be regarded as self-evident. Any other goddess may have been invoked as "the goddess"<sup>19)</sup>.

D.B. Macdonald remarked that al-ilâh<sup>u</sup> is not used in the Koran<sup>20)</sup>. He maintained that Allâh is used in the sense of "the god" i.e. as a determined common noun instead, e.g. in VI, 3 and XXVIII, 70. But Allâh as a proper name fits both instances well and the translation "the god" is not in demand<sup>21)</sup>. On the contrary it seems that the occasion to use al-ilâh simply did not present itself in the Koran because it is used in poetry of roughly the same period<sup>22)</sup>. Although Mohammed himself used only the name Allâh, it is interesting that he did not take offence when a poet used al-ilâh in the sense of Allâh<sup>23)</sup>.

In later Islam, as well as among modern scholars it is generally accepted that Allâh was derived from al-ilâh. Wellhausen saw in the etymological development of al-ilâh into Allâh<sup>u</sup> not only the creation of a new word, but also of a new god. Every tribe referred to his particular god as "the god", Allâh<sup>u</sup>, "alle sagten sie Allâh und jeder verstand seinen Gott"<sup>24)</sup>. Thus the anonymous appellative Allâh at first referred to a number of different tribal gods. But in intertribal relations the local ties faded until the word Allâh ultimately became the proper name of a new god worshipped by all the Arabs. The new god superseded the old tribal deities as a being sui generis. This in addition to the remarkable absence in the Arabic tongue of a plural "the gods" in the sense of the Greek hoi théoi or the Latin dii made Wellhausen refer, though cautiously, to the so-called monotheistic instinct of the Semites<sup>25)</sup>. The exposition of Wellhausen is not exactly in agreement with the evidence of the Koran where it is frequently stated that Allâh is the head of the pantheon of the heathen<sup>26)</sup>.

In spite of our critical approach in the preceding pages there is in our opinion only one serious obstacle for this derivation of the name Allâh, namely the elision of the first consonant of ilâh, which is alif al-qat<sup>c</sup>. In Classical Arabic hamzat al-qat<sup>c</sup> cannot be elided<sup>27)</sup>. Nevertheless there are examples of its elision in the Koran as well as in Arabic poetry. From the root l'k we have the noun mal'ak<sup>28)</sup>, 'messenger, angel', also known from Hebrew, Ugaritic, Aramaic, Ethiopic. But in the

Koran the hamza was suppressed and its vowel transferred to the preceding lâm so that malak remained. This furnishes a parallel to the elision of hamza after lâm with sukûn in Allâh. One more example will suffice: In modern (Palestinian) Arabic the same word exists in the form mar'a<sup>tun</sup> side by side with mara<sup>tun</sup>, with a small difference in meaning: The former means "woman" and the latter "wife"<sup>29)</sup>.

In North Arabian proper names<sup>30)</sup> one may also find evidence of forms with alif existing side by side with forms where it was elided. Thus we encounter y'ws'l (Lihyân) next to y'wsl (Thamûd) or <sup>c</sup>ydh1 (Lihyân). Similarly we find whblh for Wahaballâh as is evident from the Greek equivalent Ouaballas.

These considerations make it possible to accept, be it with caution, a contraction of al and ilâh as the etymology of Allâh. A confirmation of this etymology can be found in the predilection<sup>31)</sup> of the poets to use al-ilâh for Allâh.

### 3. Allâh = al+lâh:

If it is correct to find the article al in the word Allâh, it can alternatively be explained to consist of al plus lâh. Traces of a form lâh may still be found in Arabic<sup>32)</sup>. There is a very old Semitic word in Hebrew è<sup>n</sup>ôsh, "man", with Arabic equivalents unâs and nâs<sup>33)</sup>. Here we have a case where alif as a rootletter was retained in the one instance and dropped in



the other, both forms existing in Classical Arabic. If the latter form, the equivalent of a Hebrew word with the same vowels as the word for "god", is prefixed with the definite article, the resulting form annâs agree precisely with Allâh. This gives a perfect parallel of the existence of a form ilâh as well as the word Allâh resulting from al plus lâh<sup>34)</sup>. In fact the school of Basra held that Allâh was from al-lâh but they erroneously regarded lâh as infinitive of the verb lyh<sup>35)</sup>.

An etymology al-ilâh or al+lâh would mean that the god Allâh originated amongst the Arabs themselves. It would also mean that the original or primitive understanding of Allâh can only be found in pre-Islamic Arab religion — provided that it is taken into account that 'l (or 'lh) is a god common to all the Semites.

#### 4. Time and place of origin of the name:

According to the theory that the word Allâh is a contraction of al-ilâh this deity, as well as the goddess Allât, must have received their proper names among a group of Arabs who spoke a dialect employing the article al. This then must have taken place well before the time of the Nabataeans<sup>36)</sup> because the theoforic element in Nabataean names like whb'lh is undoubtedly Allâh as is proved by Greek transliterations<sup>37)</sup>. In addition the appellative force or original meaning of Allât then seems to have been forgotten among the Nabataeans as can be seen from

combinations like 'lt 'lht "Allât the goddess"<sup>38)</sup> and 'lt 'lhthm "Allât their goddess"<sup>39)</sup> in Nabataean inscriptions, though they could still understand Arabic well if they did not indeed speak Arabic.

G. Ryckmans and D. Nielsen regarded the words 'lh, 'lt or lh, lt in Lihyânic etc. as Arabic common nouns without the article, raised to the dignity of proper names and vocalised accordingly Ilâh, Ilât, or Lâh and Lât<sup>40)</sup>. If this is true, it seems clear that the contraction of al+ ilâh had not yet taken place in Lihyânite and Thamûdic and also not yet, if the reading alilat be accepted, at the time of Herodotus (died circa 430 B.C.). These data then would all point to a date between the Lihyânites and the Nabataeans i.e. between the fifth and (at the latest) the third century B.C. for the fixation of the name Allâh.

Looking for a dialect employing al, where the word Allâh could have originated, we find that Nabataean inscriptions from Sinai show a remarkable number of proper names beginning with the article al while, according to Winnett, it is seldomly met with outside Sinai<sup>41)</sup>. This could be taken as evidence that the names Allâh and Allât originated among the Arabs of Sinai and the evidence from Herodotus III, 8 would point to the same region for an article al.

According to F.V. Winnett it is entirely at variance with the geographical distribution of the inscriptions

to look for the origin of the names Allâh and Allât in Sinai<sup>42)</sup>. Although numerous Nabataeans bear Allâh-names, Allâh is not invoked in any Nabataean inscription. The majority of the references to Allât are to be found in the Safâitic inscriptions from Syria while the majority of Allât-names occur further north in Palmyrene. To find the name Allâh (with doubled l) also in Lihyânic (at least where we have 'lh and not the shorter lh) and in Thamûdic<sup>43)</sup> seems justified<sup>44)</sup> by the fact that the element 'lh of Arabic names is represented by allas in Greek (e.g. Abdallas<sup>45)</sup>, even if the Greek transcriptions of these names may be of a somewhat later period.

Religion influences namegiving in that unacceptable names are brought in line with the ruling faith. From his examination of the pre-Islamic inscriptions Winnett concluded that the occurrence of Allâh-names suggests that Lihyân (modern al-Ulâ) was the first centre of Allâh worship in Arabia<sup>46)</sup>. Invocations to Allâh occur in Lihyânite from the fifth century B.C.<sup>47)</sup> onwards and in Thamûdic from a somewhat later date onwards. Thus both the Allâh-names and invocations of Allâh converge to suggest that it was the Lihyânites who introduced the worship of Allâh into Arabia<sup>48)</sup>.

##### 5. Syriac origin:

The prosperity of the Lihyânites must have depended on widespread trading relations, and these would inevitably have subjected them to foreign influences<sup>49)</sup>. Winnett suggested that the real home of Allâh and Allât was in Syria.

"From Syria the cults of these two divinities spread down through the Hauran into Nabataea, Sinai and Lihyân, where the Southern Arabs made their acquaintance and carried Allât home to the Yemen"<sup>50)</sup> These data would then turn our search for the origin of the word Allâh away from the Sinai region, (where al- was used as definite article) to investigate Syria as country of origin.

Winnett in agreement with other scholars<sup>51)</sup> pointed out that the Syriac word for "God" is allâhâ, resembling Allâh closely in spelling. This striking similarity demands further investigation. The final -â of the Syriac word is the common Aramaic article of determination for which the Arabic case-ending would be substituted when the word is taken over into Arabic. Syriac writing does not indicate gemination though gemination can be inferred from the fact that Qushshâyâ is indicated with the b<sup>e</sup>gadh<sup>e</sup>fat- letters. Nevertheless the second consonant, l, must be read as a geminated consonant in agreement with the common Aramaic rule that a short vowel, in an unstressed open syllable, is reduced to sh<sup>e</sup>wa quiescens (the Arabic sukûn) or to a sh<sup>e</sup>wa mobile. The preservation of the short vowel indicates that it is a closed syllable (it does not have the stress) which means that the l is doubled. Thus the Syriac word is the exact equivalent of the Arabic Allâh both in the consonants and in the vowels.

There is, however, one difference: In Syriac the alif has full consonantal value whereas it is

only alif conjunctionis i.e. with hamzat al-wasl, in Arabic. The deterioration of the consonant can be ascribed to careless pronunciation of this word, due especially to its frequent use in the language<sup>52</sup>). It even became (in connection with the vocative particle yâ) yalah (the h with sukûn) in the phrase yalah aghfir lî "O God forgive me", but this is disapproved of by Arab purists<sup>53</sup>). This process of weakening the alif must then have been facilitated by the outward similarity between the first syllable of Allâh and the definite article al- which has alif conjunctionis<sup>54</sup>). Some traces of an original alif al-qat<sup>c</sup> can be found in the well-attested vocative yâ allâh<sup>u</sup> where the hamza in Allâh is hamzat al-qat<sup>c</sup>, as well as in the elliptical phrase a-fa-allâhi la-taf<sup>c</sup>alanna meaning "Then, by God, wilt thou indeed do (such a thing)?"<sup>55</sup>). Since even the hamza of the article can become hamzat al-qat<sup>c</sup> under particular circumstances, this point should however not be stressed<sup>56</sup>).

Etymologically and geographically nothing can be said against the equation of the Arabic Allâh with the Syriac allâhâ. There is however, a third requirement which must be satisfied: It must be historically possible. We found beyond doubt that the name Allâh was already well established amongst the Nabataeans in the third century B.C. and perhaps even earlier. If it is accepted that the name Allâh occurs in Lihyânic and Thamûdic, the use of that name is carried back to a date beyond the 5th century B.C., which is the date given to the oldest inscriptions from Lihyân (according

to Albright<sup>57)</sup>) and Thamûd.

We have references in Syriac literature taking us back to the beginning of the second century B.C., but the oldest preserved Syriac inscription dates back to the year 73 A.D. It is to be found on the grave of a descendant of the Arabic dynasty who ruled in Edessa (Urhai) since about 125 B.C.<sup>58)</sup>. Syriac arrived on the scene too late to be the source of the Arabic word Allâh. The same applies to Mandaic, another Aramaic dialect with the same spelling for the word "god". Winnett also referred to Nabataean and Palmyrene as Aramaic dialects with probably an identical spelling<sup>59)</sup>. But it should be kept in mind that the Nabataeans were Arabs, though they used Aramaic for writing purposes, and their writing reflects Arabisms<sup>60)</sup>. It is also not clear how the word under discussion was pronounced in Palmyra. What is lacking is irrefutable evidence of a pronunciation allâhâ from Aramaic of the fifth century B.C., or older. The common Aramaic spelling of the word for "God" must have been ʿlâhâ, as it is in Biblical Aramaic<sup>61)</sup>. In the present state of affairs it can as well be concluded that those Aramaic dialects which have a spelling similar to Allâh, possibly borrowed it from the Arabic<sup>62)</sup>.

Our investigation led neither to an indisputable solution of the etymology of the word Allâh, nor to the exact sphere and place where it originated. The Moslem believer will not share our embarrassment. To him it will be indicative of the fact that man cannot grasp God with his

mind. In fact most of the formulators of the Moslem fundamentals (al-usûlîyûn) held that the proper name Allâh had no derivation<sup>63</sup>). In view of the evidence at our disposal we can only say that it can at best be derived from al plus ilâh (or lâh) and that it was already a proper name in the fifth century B.C., among northern dialectical groups, for the Lihyânites and the people of Thamûd in all probability used it as such, and certainly the Nabataeans in the third century B.C.

#### B. The Ultimate Origin of the Word.

Every worthy theory on the origin of the name Allâh brings it into relation with the root 'lh, which is also found in the Arabic word for "god" namely ilâh<sup>64</sup>). In current Arabic versions of the Bible the word "God" ('l, 'l<sup>w</sup>h and 'lh<sup>y</sup>m) is uniformly translated by Allâh<sup>65</sup>) and according to Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî some Moslems held that the word Allâh was of Syriac or Hebrew origin<sup>66</sup>). The translation of the Bible versions and the last mentioned theory are legitimate in as far as they are pointing to the fact that the name Allâh is an Arabic form of the common Semitic noun 'l(h).

The erudition of many great scholars was applied in search of the original meaning of the common Semitic word for "God" and to arrive at the basic concept of the root, but no one succeeded to formulate an etymology that attained the merit of general acceptance<sup>67</sup>). We present

here what to us seems to be a sound approach to the whole problem.

1. The relationship il : ilâh:

A. Fischer saw in ilâh the original Semitic word for God. Il is an abbreviation of this word which figured in this short form in theoforic proper names already in Proto-Semitic times. Later the shortened form gained independent existence and even largely replaced the original ilâh<sup>68</sup>). Murtonen objected that the Accadians did not know the longer form and that it also played an insignificant role amongst the Canaanites<sup>69</sup>).

We believe that the opposite development took place. N. Rhodokanakis drew attention to a phenomenon in the South Arabian inscriptions he called the "zweigipflige Akzent"<sup>70</sup>). In the South Arabian inscriptions only consonants were expressed, but it can be taken for granted that the feminine plural ending was -ât. In a good number of cases this was expressed by -ht which means that the long vowel â was often pronounced â-á to result in a form ahat. Thus a long vowel may be dissolved into two homogeneous vowels separated by h. To this phenomenon may be compared: The Dutch and Afrikaans word: dag (literally "day" but generally used as a greeting like: "Good day!") which sounds like dahag when it is called out; Hebrew <sup>a</sup>rāsôt and Mandaic arqahata; Hebrew âbôt- "fathers" and Syriac abâhâtâ<sup>71</sup>); Hebrew immôt and Ugaritic umht; the North-Israelitic form of the inter-



rogative particle 'êhî<sup>y</sup> in Hos. 13:10, 14 and the usual Hebrew interrogative particle 'ê<sup>y</sup>; Ugaritic plural ilm and the more occasional form ilhm; and Arabic âl and ahl — both meaning "family". In an inscription from Safâ we find the proper name bsh and from two other inscriptions containing the same genealogy it is clear that the name of the same person was also written bhsh<sup>72)</sup>. In the same way we can conceive a development ilâ > ilâh<sup>u</sup>. For the intermediate form ilâ one may perhaps compare abâ a form of ab used by some Arabs in all three cases<sup>73)</sup>.

The present writer is convinced that scholars who saw in ilâh a vocative form of il were on the right track<sup>74)</sup>. In view of the above their theory must be slightly modified: It is true that the h can best be understood as resulting from the long vowel a when a word is called out, but it seems to be a widespread phenomenon that the originally long vowel<sup>75)</sup> showed a tendency to be pronounced "zweigipflig" and as such to be represented by two vowels, not necessarily of the same length, separated by h. This phenomenon must also be as old as the language itself and might well have been representative in some cases of regional pronunciation<sup>76)</sup>.

## 2. The etymology of il:

If ilâh is an extension of il, we will have to investigate the etymology of il<sup>77)</sup>, though this word is not used in Arabic except as a theoforic element in proper names<sup>78)</sup>. Frank Zimmerman produced evidence that il is

derived from the Arabic ill<sup>un 79)</sup>. This word is used in the particular sense of a) relationship (cf. the Koran IX, 8), b) a covenant between two parties by which either is bound to protect the other, c) lordship<sup>80)</sup>. Others derived it from the root 'ly which has the meaning "goal, direction" (compare the Hebrew preposition èl, Arabic ilâ<sup>y</sup>), or the meaning "to be strong"<sup>81)</sup>. Jean Starcky followed Nöldeke who explained the word from the root 'wl "to be in front, first"<sup>82)</sup>.

As Murtonen already pointed out, all the suggested etymologies have the common weakness that they can explain only part of the essential meaning of the word il<sup>83)</sup>. Ugaritic words like g- "voice" and d- "hand" (only in combinations) confirmed the theory that many, if not all, Semitic words can be traced back to originally biconsonantal or even monoconsonantal roots, and these words prove that the hypothesis is not relating to a prehistoric period but constitutes a historical reality<sup>84)</sup>. Therefore all these theories that endeavoured to explain the etymology of il were based on the wrong presumption that it had to be derived from a triconsonantal root. All these roots have on the contrary been derived from the word il and consequently reflect different shades of the meaning of this word<sup>85)</sup>. Their existence must be seen as an attempt to adapt the biconsonantal word to the normalized triconsonantal system which became characteristic of the Semitic languages. il is in fact a very old word; the oldest Semitic word for "god".

In South Arabia the deity was often brought

into family or tribal relationship with his worshippers. He is father, brother, uncle, etc.<sup>86)</sup>, of the members of the tribe who are his offspring, his priests, his companions, his servants, etc. These ideas were not altogether foreign to the North-Western Semites either<sup>87)</sup>. In certain Biblical passages like Ex. 15:15 and Ezek. 17:13; 31:11, the word êlîm signifies the tribal leaders<sup>88)</sup>. Furthermore the Arabic word âl is exclusively used for an illustrious clan in contrast with the word ahl. These facts inter alia and the meaning of the (in our opinion derived) root 'wl meaning "to be in front" led J. Starcky<sup>89)</sup> to the following conclusion: "Les premiers Sémites, qui étaient des nomades, ont certainement conçu la divinité comme une puissance tutélaire qui les entourait de sa sollicitude, à l'instar du groupe ethnique dont ils étaient membres, et du 'cheikh' qui les dirigeait. Ils l'ont donc désignée par ha-'êl ou ilum, et ce mot prit bientôt le sens de 'dieu', ce qui suppose que la divinité ainsi nommée était la seule vénérée dans le groupe ethnique"<sup>90)</sup>. If this hypothesis is correct we are here supplied with the origin of the concept il. This view is confirmed by the South Arabian inscriptions where theoforic names imply that Il belonged to the clan as the head of it and where his function was that of a guardian defending the rights of the members of the clan<sup>91)</sup>.

On the other hand the word il may be analysed still further and traced back to the Proto-Semitic mono-consonantal root l, for alif is commonly used to extend a root in the formation of nouns<sup>92)</sup>. The root l then had

the basic meaning of: That which is far away; that which is powerful<sup>93)</sup> — because it is capable to exercise its influence over such a distance<sup>94)</sup>. In the biblical phrase yèsh-l<sup>e</sup>'ēl yâdî the word ēl means "power" according to W. Baumgartner<sup>95)</sup> while the element of distance may be found in the l used as a deictic element e.g. in the Arabic demonstrative pronoun. The concept of power would be in agreement with the proclitic emphasizing particle la/lû found in Arabic, Ugaritic and Hebrew (e.g. Gen. 30:34). The idea of distance would be reflected in the Hebrew particle lû expressing a wish and the negative al (Ugaritic, Hebrew), lâ (Arabic) — that which is far away and therefore not known. In Ugaritic the negatives al and bl are in fact also used with positive force in the sense of: "surely"<sup>96)</sup>, showing that opposite meanings could be conveyed using the same word. Thence also the derived verb l'h (Hebrew), la (Ugaritic), etc., meaning "to be weak", can be explained. The Arabic interrogative particle hal<sup>97)</sup> reflects the uncertainty about that which is distant. In this context it is interesting to note that according to some grammarians hal was originally equivalent in meaning to the particle qad<sup>98)</sup>. Can it be accidental that of the Ugaritic words for "lo, behold" hn is used to indicate what is nearby in text 77:45, 46: hn bpy sprhn, whereas hl indicates what is further off in <sup>c</sup>nt II:17 : whln. <sup>c</sup>nt. tmgyn? However this may be, it is important to note to the contrary that Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Arabic hlm means "here, hither".

### 3. Conclusion:

In conclusion we may repeat that the name Allâh as well as the word ilâh have their ultimate origin in the word il. The etymology of il in turn is complex. It is one of the few words that belong to the common stock of all the Semitic peoples<sup>99)</sup> and because of its antiquity<sup>100)</sup> it is unlikely that its etymology will ever be established beyond all doubt. We may accept that primitive Semitic thought associated the conceptions of distance and especially of power with the root 'l'. Consequently this root was not only used to indicate the powerful and respected leader of the tribe, but also constituted an appropriate name for "God".

Many scholars are of the opinion that Il was at first the name of a particular god, the most eminent representative who gave his name to the whole class of gods<sup>101)</sup>. As to the place of origin of this god Il, it has been said that the evidence points to the Northwest Semitic region where the god figured prominently in the Ugaritic mythological texts as well as in theoforic names. In fact Otto Eissfeldt claimed that "El is the particular contribution of Canaan to the world"<sup>102)</sup>. This statement must be approached with caution for I.J. Gelb concluded from his investigation of Accadian texts that Il was a most important god amongst the Mesopotamian Semites of the pre-Sargonic period, i.e. a thousand years before the Ugaritic texts<sup>103)</sup>. The name Il was in addition found in North and Central Arabia — exclusively in theoforic names — and also in South Arabia,

where it was mainly used in personal names<sup>104)</sup>. M. Höfner concluded "dass es sich hier um eine sehr urtümliche Göttergestalt handelt; man möchte an einen gemeinsemit. Nomadischen Himmels-gott denken, der später hinter den verschiedenen Einzelgöttern, Stammesgöttern u. dgl. zurücktritt"<sup>105)</sup>.

Thus Il can be seen as the god who was originally the prime divinity of the Semites<sup>106)</sup>. Because Il was the god par excellence and the embodiment of the idea of the divine, the word il came to be applied to any god to indicate him as a god<sup>107)</sup>. When the Semites entered Mesopotamia they absorbed the religion they found there, at the cost of their own, with the result that Il fell into oblivion<sup>108)</sup>. If it is correct to find the ultimate origin of the name Allâh in the word il and to find in 'l the proper name of a god, the god Il also disappeared from the Arab religion but revived among the Northern Arabs with a new name: Allâh.

## CHAPTER FOUR

ALLÂH BEFORE THE ADVENT OF ISLAM

Our knowledge of pre-Islamic religion in Arabia is still very deficient in spite of the pioneer work of great scholars initiated by Wellhausen and Nielsen and in spite of the decipherment of the numerous inscriptions which have been collected — often in peril of life. Allâh does not figure in Les Religions Arabes Préislamiques (1951) of G. Ryckmans and only a few lines are devoted to il/ilâh/lâh. As far as our present subject is concerned René Dussaud had in fact good reason to remark that "nos sources sont muettes sur le rôle d'Allâh avant Mahomet"<sup>1)</sup>. Consequently the investigator is forced to resort to the most diverse sources in order to form some picture of the image and emotions the name Allâh invoked in the hearts and minds of the people of Arabia at a time when the name Mohammed did not yet bear any exceptional significance.

It is beyond doubt that the word Allâh is philologically related to the god Il of the Ugaritic texts and of the South-Arabian inscriptions. The roots of a conception of Allâh can therefore in the first place be found in the Ugaritic material<sup>2)</sup> — taking the necessary precautions into consideration when a synthesis is made.

A. Il of Ugarit:

As we have mentioned in our study of the origin of the word Allâh, the word il originally signified a dynamic

strength which is the primitive and fundamental characteristic of the leading God of the Semitic pantheon. The Ugaritic myths revealed that Il was the proper name of the greatest god of the original Canaanite pantheon<sup>3)</sup>. Il is father<sup>4)</sup> of the gods and creator of the creatures, bny bnwt<sup>5)</sup>. He is also the father of mankind, ab adm<sup>6)</sup> and creator of the earth<sup>7)</sup>. Il is described as king<sup>8)</sup> and the expression, mlk ab shnm<sup>9)</sup>, possibly designates him as "the king, the father of the luminaries"<sup>10)</sup>. Because of his creative powers Il is symbolized with the epithet "bull", thr<sup>11)</sup>, but the texts represent him as already senile<sup>12)</sup> and sexually<sup>13)</sup> and physically<sup>14)</sup> weakened. The texts give the impression that when the bulk of them was constructed Il was becoming a deus otiosus substituted by other gods notably Ba<sup>c</sup>al, Mōt and Yamm. Although Il still has to give his consent in important matters, e.g. the building of a palace for Ba<sup>c</sup>al<sup>15)</sup>, he is not always treated with due respect<sup>16)</sup>. In fact he is rather humanly pictured as highly emotional with outbursts ranging from the depths of sorrow to the heights of joy and pleasure<sup>17)</sup>. The aged Il is singled out among the Ugaritic gods for the epithet "(the) wise", hkm<sup>18)</sup>. He is called "holy", qdsh<sup>19)</sup>, and "beneficent Il benign", ltpn il dpid<sup>20)</sup>. He does not appear to be a violent god.

Though Il once ruled in heaven<sup>21)</sup> the Ugaritic myths represent him as being in the netherworld whither he had been presumably banished by Ba<sup>c</sup>al<sup>22)</sup>. But even under these circumstances Il's original position as head of the pantheon is reflected<sup>23)</sup>: When Ba<sup>c</sup>al has died the gods in their crisis automatically resort to Il who appoints Athtr<sup>c</sup>



as successor<sup>24)</sup>.

B. The evidence from South Arabia:

It has been established beyond any doubt that the pre-Islamic North Arabian tribes of Lihyân, Thamûd and Safâ, amongst whom we found the first traces of the name Allâh, had close contacts with South Arabia. In form the writing of the Lihyânîc inscriptions closely resembles the South Arabian alphabet<sup>25)</sup> and the writing used in the Thamûdic and Safâitic inscriptions has likewise been derived from the South Arabian<sup>26)</sup>. The South Arabians became famous as tradesmen of Eastern commodities and more particularly as incense traders introducing the products<sup>27)</sup> of India and South Arabia to the West. In pursuit of this occupation they not only travelled widely, but also established trade colonies to facilitate their commerce and to look after their interests. In fact modern al-<sup>c</sup>Ula, an oasis in the northern Hidjâz, situated in the region where most of the Lihyânîc inscriptions have been found, has been identified<sup>28)</sup> with Dedan, the old Minaean trade colony<sup>29)</sup>. In this context it is interesting to note that Wadd, mentioned in the Koran LXXI, 23 as one of the gods of Noah's contemporaries, was worshipped by Lihyân in Dedan where he had a temple<sup>30)</sup>. Wadd was the official name of the moon-god in Ma<sup>c</sup>în where he was the national god of the Minaeans<sup>31)</sup>. René Dussaud even found justification to refer to the Lihyânîtes, Thamûdeans and Safâites as the South Arabians in Syria<sup>32)</sup>. The prophet Mohammed had great respect for South Arabian culture and tradition attributes to him the saying: "The faith is of Yemen, the wisdom is of Yemen and the Islam is of Yemen"<sup>33)</sup>.

It is very interesting to find the theoforic element 'lh or lh<sup>34)</sup> already at this early date, in South Arabian names like 'lhtb<sup>c</sup> (Saba'), s<sup>c</sup>dlh (Saba') and <sup>c</sup>bdlh (Mina).

Il<sup>35)</sup> is only rarely mentioned in the South Arabian inscriptions as an individual god and our main source of information is the many South Arabian personal names containing 'il as theoforic element<sup>36)</sup>.

As in Ugarit, Il was originally the prime god in the official religion and as such he was called 'l t<sup>c</sup>ly<sup>37)</sup>, Il the most high<sup>38)</sup>. The same Il is meant when in a Sabaeen inscription the lord of heaven and earth is invoked<sup>39)</sup>. In a Qatabanian inscription Il carries the epithet fkhr which probably signifies him as the Creator and means "the potter"<sup>40)</sup>. An investigation of the South Arabian personal names reveals that 'l was the only theophoric element used in the oldest time<sup>41)</sup> and that these names belong mainly to the Minaean and oldest Sabaeen inscriptions<sup>42)</sup>. These names describe Il as the first<sup>43)</sup>, and the exalted<sup>44)</sup>. He is the knowing<sup>45)</sup> king<sup>46)</sup> and righteous<sup>47)</sup> judge<sup>48)</sup> who severely punishes<sup>49)</sup> iniquity. He was also known for his great love<sup>50)</sup>. Il is addressed as father<sup>51)</sup>. Children<sup>52)</sup>, agricultural fertility<sup>53)</sup> and prosperity<sup>54)</sup> come from him who is always prepared to listen<sup>55)</sup> to the needs of his creatures when they call upon his name<sup>56)</sup>. They find him willing to pardon their sin<sup>57)</sup> and to bless them with health and a long life<sup>58)</sup>. He pastures them like sheep<sup>59)</sup>. Il is the trustworthy<sup>60)</sup> guard of his people who has the strength<sup>61)</sup> to protect<sup>62)</sup> them and act as their saviour<sup>63)</sup>. Il leads his people in war and gives

them victory<sup>64)</sup> over their enemies<sup>65)</sup>. These names by which Il is variously known, reveal a very high and noble concept of his person, uniting simple trust with reverence for his holiness and righteousness<sup>66)</sup>.

Minaean inscriptions from circa 450 B.C. prove that Il was still the most important god in South Arabian religion in this period<sup>67)</sup>. But according to a Qatabanian inscription, where he is listed last of the gods mentioned, Il lost all real significance towards the end of the second century B.C.<sup>68)</sup>. He is rarely mentioned in later inscriptions although the oldest proper names revealed a stage where Il was the prime god, probably when the dynasty was founded<sup>69)</sup>. Il was replaced by <sup>c</sup>Athtar, the Morningstar, a war and fertility god<sup>70)</sup>. How completely this replacement was, is difficult to say. Il is still mentioned and we may believe that in difficult times people would still take their refuge in him.

Since Ditlef Nielsen<sup>71)</sup> identified Il in South Arabian religion with the moongod and reduced the gods of the South Arabian pantheon to an exclusive triad consisting of the moongod, the sungoddess and their child Venus, this theory met with severe criticism<sup>72)</sup>. The important place of the mentioned triad of gods in South Arabian religion can not be disputed<sup>73)</sup>. To state that all the names of gods in that pantheon represent these three gods under different names is, however, not proved by the texts<sup>74)</sup> and seems to be an oversimplification. The identity of Il with the moongod remains a widely rejected theory. Nevertheless it is

interesting that at the end of official inscriptions the gods are mentioned in the sequence <sup>c</sup>Athtar (Venus), Moon, Sun<sup>75)</sup>. This sequence is remarkable since one would expect the national god, the moon, to occupy the first position. It is the more remarkable because it implies that the moongod had been surpassed by <sup>c</sup>Athtar<sup>76)</sup>, reminding us of our previous conclusion that it was Il who was replaced by <sup>c</sup>Athtar. Furthermore the moon shares with Il a number of epithets, notably thaur<sup>77)</sup>, ab<sup>78)</sup>, samī<sup>c 79)</sup>. In addition the official name of the moongod in Saba<sup>1</sup> was 'lmgh, translated by Jamme "Il is mighty" (Ilumguh<sup>u</sup>)<sup>80)</sup>. However we may vocalize this word, it is clear that it contains the name Il<sup>81)</sup>. It has been suggested that the moongod took over some of the qualities of Il when <sup>c</sup>Athtar overcame him<sup>82)</sup>. But the points to which we have just referred as well as the traces of a moon centred cult found in the Israelitic and Islamic religions<sup>83)</sup> seem to point to some connection of the Il-cult with the moon. Possibly there was a stage when Il was worshipped in Arabia in the image of the moon<sup>84)</sup>. The views of Nielsen were exaggerated but his overstatements should not prejudice what is sound in them.

#### C. The evidence from North Arabia:

It is among the Northern dialectical groups that the name Allâh was already current in the fifth century B.C. In Lihyânic, Thamûdic and Safâitic theoforic names the element il<sup>85)</sup> is used predominantly. The element 'lh, lh representing the name Allâh is also met with<sup>86)</sup>, markedly

in alternation with il<sup>87)</sup>. This confirms our conclusion in the previous chapter that Il and Allâh are identical.

The theoforic proper names of the Northern Arabs of the pre-Islamic era reveal that Il was the most important god in their pantheon. Accordingly he was known as the most High<sup>88)</sup>. He is the living one<sup>89)</sup>, the manifest<sup>90)</sup> creator<sup>91)</sup>. Many epitheta put Il in a tribal relationship with his people: He is father<sup>92)</sup> and the people are his children<sup>93)</sup>. He is father-in-law<sup>94)</sup>, uncle<sup>95)</sup>, he is the leader of the tribe<sup>96)</sup> and its members are his partisans<sup>97)</sup>, he is their friend<sup>98)</sup>. Il is near<sup>99)</sup> to his people, guiding them by tangible laws<sup>100)</sup>. Il is jealous<sup>101)</sup> of his people who are the objects of his love<sup>102)</sup>. Il is as strong<sup>103)</sup> as a lion<sup>104)</sup>. He protects<sup>105)</sup> his clients<sup>106)</sup>. In wartime Il gives victory<sup>107)</sup>. He humbles<sup>108)</sup> the enemy, he crushes<sup>109)</sup> him, lays waste<sup>110)</sup> his land, and reduces him to slavery<sup>111)</sup>. He rejoices at the defeat of the enemy<sup>112)</sup>. Il is brave<sup>113)</sup> and makes brave<sup>114)</sup> those who seek refuge with him<sup>115)</sup>. He saves<sup>116)</sup> his people from their distress and gives them assistance<sup>117)</sup>. Individuals are chosen as his favourites<sup>118)</sup> and some are consecrated<sup>119)</sup> to him by special vows.

The tender care of Il for his people is expressed by the metaphor of the shepherd<sup>120)</sup>. When they cry out<sup>121)</sup> in his name<sup>122)</sup> he listens<sup>123)</sup>. Il is also likened to a king<sup>124)</sup>. He is lord<sup>125)</sup> and the people are his servants<sup>126)</sup>. In fact their position is that of slaves towards their master<sup>127)</sup>. They are dependant on the wish of Allâh<sup>128)</sup>. But he is good<sup>129)</sup>. He knows<sup>130)</sup> them and their

fears and he causes them to smile<sup>131)</sup>. He rewards their good deeds<sup>132)</sup>. He is benevolent giving grace<sup>133)</sup> and he is willing to pardon<sup>134)</sup> their sins. He cures<sup>135)</sup> their illnesses. The gifts of children and wealth are from Il<sup>136)</sup>, provided by his creative word<sup>137)</sup>. Il gives abundantly<sup>138)</sup>. Indeed, Il is great<sup>139)</sup>, he is the one who deserves praise<sup>140)</sup>. He disposes over life to lengthen it<sup>141)</sup>, and when the mother dies at childbirth it is Il who takes her away<sup>142)</sup>. Il is pure and guiltless<sup>143)</sup>. Il is calm<sup>144)</sup> and contented<sup>145)</sup> of nature.

Other theoforic names imply that Il was becoming a deus otiosus<sup>146)</sup>. It was felt that Il became distant<sup>147)</sup> and even hostile<sup>148)</sup>. He became slow<sup>149)</sup>, repenting<sup>150)</sup> and emotional<sup>151)</sup>. He is no longer described in terms of his former dignity<sup>152)</sup>.

Some theoforic names identify Il with the moon — that is to say if they are taken at face value. Names of particular importance in this context are such as bḏrl (Safâ), dhrh'1 (Liḥyân) and <sup>c</sup>rb'1 (Safâ). The root bḏr<sup>153)</sup> is the word in Classical Arabic to signify the moon when it has become full and round. The word dhrh describes Il as a shining luminary<sup>154)</sup> and in the Old Testament it is used to describe the rising sun<sup>155)</sup>. The name <sup>c</sup>rb'1 pictures the setting of Il in the West for <sup>c</sup>rb is likewise used of the sun in the South Arabian inscriptions<sup>156)</sup>. Alternatively one could take the element il in these and other names like nhr'1, nr'1, sn'1, <sup>c</sup>m'1, shhr'1 as an appellative and

translate accordingly "Nahar is god, Sin is god", etc. The latter solution is however not as selfevident as one tends to believe. This is demonstrated by a name like <sup>c</sup>mhrdw where the element <sup>c</sup>m is clearly not the official name of the national moongod in Qatabân, but simply the word for "(paternal) uncle"<sup>157)</sup>. Moreover a name like "<sup>c</sup>Amm is god"<sup>158)</sup> could only be sensible in the context of a polemical exclusivism, unknown in the polytheistic setting of the time<sup>159)</sup>. Unless the name conveys the sense of "<sup>c</sup>Amm is my god"<sup>160)</sup>, expressing the relation of the worshipper to a particular god. On the other hand it is clear that Nahar, <sup>c</sup>Amm, etc., were used as proper names of gods in theoforic names like nhrwhb (Safâ) and <sup>c</sup>mr'y (Lihyân)<sup>161)</sup>.

In the inscriptions of the Northern Arabs and, as far as the people of Safâ is concerned more particularly in drawings, the chief Safâitic deity, Allât was represented as the sungoddess<sup>162)</sup>. This leads to the conclusion that her male counterpart Allâh, rarely mentioned in Safâitic inscriptions, was associated with the moon. More often than of Allâh the Safâitic inscriptions make mention of Rudâ written rdw and rdy. This deity was identified with Venus both in the planet's appearance as a morning and as an evening star. Probably rdw represents his appearance as god while rdy refers to the female appearance as the evening star<sup>163)</sup>. Also in Thamûdic inscriptions Rudâ is one of the gods invoked most frequently. Though under a different name, Venus overshadowed Il/Allâh amongst the Northern Arab tribes as well.

According to the inscriptions it is Allâh who grants his servant a long life and good luck. He guides them and gives them peace and prosperity<sup>164</sup>).

One word used in a number of Thamûdic inscriptions deserves special attention in our quest for the pre-Islamic concept of Allâh. We give an example of such an inscription using the word 'btr. It reads: h'lh 'btr bk hsrr<sup>165</sup>). E. Littmann translated "O Gott, durch dich ist die Freude verheissen". Because of the position of the word 'btr in this inscription Littmann thinks it should be a verb of the root btr "to cut" rather than an epithet of Allâh. In Classical Arabic the verb batara means "to cut off the tail of an animal". The word abtar is applied to a person having no offspring or progeny<sup>166</sup>). In the Koran CVIII, 3 abtar is used as a threat against Mohammed's enemies. It is said that Mohammed himself had been mocked because he had no surviving sons, giving occasion to this verse of the Koran. Thus we could translate "O Allâh who has no progeny, happiness originates with you". If this is correct the word abtar contains a confession of monotheism which would later become characteristic of Islam, and represents an early example of the convictions of the Hanîfs. The interpretation of the word 'btr remains, however, a matter of uncertainty<sup>167</sup>).

#### D. Allâh according to pagan poetry:

The name Allâh occurs quite frequently in pre-Islamic poetry. Taken at face value this poetry could



present the most reliable and informative data on the concept of Allâh before the era of Mohammed<sup>168</sup>). This poetry remained the object for a study of pure Arabic for the grammarians of Kûfa and Basra. It was generally considered to be the starting point of linguistic work and the model of a perfect usage of the language. In fact the poetry had its influence on the orthography of the Koran for its dialect was adapted to the "high Arabic" of the poets. Unfortunately the pagan poetry of Northern Arabia hardly contains any religious sentiment. A large number of the references to Allâh are oath formulae and the overall impression is that the pagan poetry is religiously indifferent<sup>169</sup>). It is also beyond any doubt that many of the instances where the name Allâh is used, are not authentic. The Arabs were masters of the art of poetry and it is known that a Râwiya could imitate the style of his master so well that nobody could discern his own improvisations from the work of his master — in spite of the strict schematism and the complicated construction of Arabic poetry<sup>170</sup>). We have evidence that offensive words were replaced in Islamic times by others of the same metrical value<sup>171</sup>). The names of pagan gods were often replaced in Islamic times by the name of Allâh to wipe out the traces of paganism of a relation or a heroic poet<sup>172</sup>) — in the same way as the theoforic element in proper names was changed to Allâh<sup>173</sup>). Arabian poetry was written down only in the Islamic era when the well-known collections were compiled. Naturally many (probably most) instances of the use of the name Allâh in pagan poetry are authentic. But apart from the question of authenticity by the possibility and often probability of Jewish

or Christian influence casts a shadow of doubt over the legitimate use of pagan poetry as a portrayal of the Allâh of pre-Islamic Arab religion. These considerations clearly indicate that poems of pagan origin present no secure basis to build up the Arab concept of Allâh. Subject to this reservation we now proceed to present information on the use of Allâh by pagan poets<sup>174)</sup>.

The name Allâh is frequently invoked in oaths<sup>175)</sup> with the implication that he acts as witness to the truth of the statement. Oaths are taken by the life of Allâh for he alone is not subjected to death<sup>176)</sup>. Allâh determines the destiny of man<sup>177)</sup>. He decrees the good and the bad<sup>178)</sup>. Allâh punishes the thief when night covers him with darkness<sup>179)</sup>. He requites every person according to his deeds<sup>180)</sup>. His decree is fulfilled<sup>181)</sup>. Allâh knows everything; he knows what is hidden<sup>182)</sup>; therefore he can be called upon as witness. Man is his servant<sup>183)</sup>. Man should fear Allâh for to do so is greater than to have booty or treasures or earthly friendships<sup>184)</sup>. He can trust Allâh to defend him<sup>185)</sup> for Allâh is faithful<sup>186)</sup>. Beyond Allâh man has no recourse<sup>187)</sup>. Allâh creates him in the womb of his mother<sup>188)</sup> and everybody is on his way to meet Allâh in death<sup>189)</sup>. Nevertheless Allâh does not desire the death of man<sup>190)</sup>. The mercy of Allâh<sup>191)</sup> is a source of comfort for his people. Allâh is the patron of guests<sup>192)</sup>. Allâh does not allow his people to be disloyal to friends<sup>193)</sup>, to be treacherous<sup>194)</sup>, or to do evil<sup>195)</sup>. It is Allâh who provides the rain, the heavy downpours as well as the continuous drizzle<sup>196)</sup>. Praise should be given to Allâh<sup>197)</sup>. Qais ibn al-Khatîm<sup>198)</sup> a

Medinan poet, referred to Allâh as the creator and as lord of the building i.e. of the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba in Mecca. He states that Allâh will only what he will (11, 8). Interesting is a verse of the pagan poet Aus ibn Hadjar al-Tamîmî: "By Allât and al-<sup>c</sup>Uzzâ and their worshippers, and by Allâh, and he is certainly greater than they are"<sup>199</sup>).

The pagan poetry pictures Allâh along the same lines as the other sources discussed above. It is interesting that a poet of the beginning of the Islamic era warns his people not to consider Allâh ignorant and forgetful<sup>200</sup>). The necessity of such a remark shows that Allâh faded into the background of religious concern but that he was making a come-back.

#### E. The pre-Islamic Allâh according to the Koran:

The Koran is another important source of information concerning pre-Islamic religion. According to Sûra XXI, 51(52) - 70 father Abraham already warned his people to dispose of their idols and to serve Allâh the only true god. This anecdote, however, implies a connection with the Jewish religion to which we will return at a later stage in our discussion<sup>201</sup>). The Koran testifies that in difficult times the heathen Arabs turned to Allâh, their only god in distress<sup>202</sup>). In times of comfort they slid back into polytheism. They regarded Allâh as the supreme god who possesses the earth and everything on it, who sits as lord on his heavenly throne and rules the Universe as king<sup>203</sup>). They swore solemn oaths by Allâh<sup>204</sup>). Above all

they recognized him as the creator<sup>205)</sup> and the giver of rain<sup>206)</sup>. They believed that the life of every individual was determined by the will of Allâh<sup>207)</sup>. Their great sin in the eyes of Mohammed was that they acknowledged other gods beside Allâh<sup>208)</sup>, more particularly the three goddesses Manât, Allât and al-<sup>c</sup>Uzzâ, the so-called daughters of Allâh<sup>209)</sup>. Furthermore the pagan Meccans derived the authority to do things described by the Koran as an abomination from Allâh, claiming that it was the custom of their ancestors and the command of Allâh<sup>210)</sup>. In their turn the Meccans took offence in Mohammed's doctrine of the resurrection and maintained that he is inventing lies against Allâh<sup>211)</sup>.

The polemic of the Koran implies that the pre-Islamic Arabs often experienced Allâh as some distant unapproachable god. Their idols then served the practical purpose of being intercessors through whom they could communicate with him<sup>212)</sup>. This was in fact their justification for the worship of the partners of Allâh<sup>213)</sup>. One may even find allusions to the celestial character of Allâh in the Koran<sup>214)</sup>.

It is however extremely important to realise that the unity of God, polytheism or the final judgement was not the subject of the very oldest sûras of the Koran<sup>215)</sup>. In fact these sûras<sup>216)</sup> reflect Mohammed as a member of his tribe whose interests he shares and whose religion he naturally follows. Thus Mohammed advises his tribe in the Sûrat Quraish to worship the lord of the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba<sup>217)</sup> in order

to ensure the security of their trade caravans; Sûra CVI contains no trace of his future breach with the Quraish. There is nothing to indicate that Mohammed is in opposition with the religion of his countrymen or that he intends to found a new religion<sup>218)</sup>. In this context the original form of Sûra LIII, 19 - 25, acknowledging the pagan goddesses Allât, al-<sup>c</sup>Uzzâ and Manât, finds its natural setting. Later when the relation between Mohammed and the Meccans was severed<sup>219)</sup> and when monotheism became a central theme of his preaching these verses were changed and the goddesses described as "naught but names"<sup>220)</sup>. In spite of the hostilities between Mohammed and the Meccans, he insisted that he was continuing the religion of the ancestors of the Arabs in its original pure form<sup>221)</sup>. His object was to remove the partners<sup>222)</sup> given to Allâh by the pagans. This monotheistic trend was developed in no small measure before Mohammed and finds its concrete expression in the term hanîf. It is therefore to be expected that there will be no great or essential difference between the Islamic and the pre-Islamic concept of Allâh<sup>223)</sup>.

F. Hubal and Allâh:

The reference of Mohammed to the "lord of the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba"<sup>224)</sup> at the beginning of his career and even the later reference to the only god Mohammed worships, the "lord of the territory of Mecca"<sup>225)</sup>, could signify to the Meccans only one god viz. Hubal. Hubal was the god of first importance in the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba of Mecca which contained a statue depicting him in human form<sup>226)</sup>. Wellhausen pointed

out the remarkable fact that the Koran contains no polemic against Hubal whereas Mohammed as well as his opponents acknowledged Allâh as lord of the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba<sup>227</sup>). He suggested that Hubal was the original proper name and Allâh originally the appellation of the lord of the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba. Consecutively the name Allâh replaced the name Hubal completely<sup>228</sup>).

This identification is, however, not yet proved by the available facts. Our knowledge of Hubal<sup>229</sup>) is too scanty and the lack of any polemics by Mohammed against him may purely have been for the same tactical reason he associated Allâh with the Ka<sup>c</sup>ba. Furthermore a severe criticism of the statue of Hubal can be pointed out at a later stage of the prophet's career. No Meccan could fail to understand the implications of the story how Abraham ridiculed and rejected the idols of his people. This story and other similar outright rejections of idolatry occur frequently in later parts of the Koran<sup>230</sup>). During the ill-fated encounter at Uhud, Mohammed had the courage to call out 'Allâh is most high' in reply to Abû Sufyân's exclamation: 'High Hubal'<sup>231</sup>).

#### G. Moslem authors and Allâh before Islam:

The prejudiced account of pre-Islamic religion by Moslem writers, stemming from a period when the memory of the Djâhilîya was no longer clear in the mind<sup>232</sup>), is of little use for our present purpose. The most impressive work of this kind is the Kitâb al-Asnâm of Ibn al-Kalbî, the well-known historian of the second century A.H.<sup>233</sup>). From

this source we can only add a report about the Khaulân, a tribe of the Yemen. They used to divide their crops and cattle between the god Umyânis / Amm'anas and Allâh, favouring the former in the division<sup>234)</sup>.

The Quraish were the dominant tribe in Mecca in the sixth century after they secured political supremacy over the ruling Khuzâ<sup>c</sup> when they abandoned their nomadic life in the last quarter of the fifth century A.D.<sup>235)</sup>. The prehistory of the Quraish is hidden in obscurity. D. S. Margoliouth<sup>236)</sup> collected references to them from Moslem writers which are of interest for our subject. According to them Alî, cousin and son-in-law of the prophet, declared that the Quraish were Nabataeans from Kûthâ in Mesopotamia. Secondly it was said that Kûthâ, the name of a town on the Euphrates was also the name of Mecca, or part of it. Furthermore the Quraish were known in Arabia as the family of Allâh. It seems possible that Allâh, the male deity of which Allât was the female, was the tribal god of the Quraish. According to ancient custom to worship the local territorial god(s), the Quraish, when they became supreme, gave their deity a place beside the deities of older tribes, such as Al-<sup>c</sup>Uzzâ, Al-Lât and Manât. Mohammed rejected this "associating" (shirk) of Allâh with other gods and identified him with the object of monotheistic adoration. In our previous chapter it was pointed out that Nabataean names containing the theoforic element Allâh are in abundance. If the evidence collected by Margoliouth can be accepted<sup>237)</sup>, the Nabataean Quraish introduced Allâh from the North into Mecca.

#### H. Pre-Islamic use of the name Allâh by Christians:

Christianity spread to the Arabs at an early date<sup>238)</sup> while the Arabian deserts also provided anathemized sectarian groups with safe shelter against orthodox persecution. Although it is not possible to identify all the different types of teaching representing Christianity in Arabia before the Islam, the general impression is that a strong Judaistic tendency was prevalent<sup>239)</sup>. In the sixth century the most important Christian groups in Arabia were Monophysite and Nestorian. Both these groups used Syriac as the language of the Church. It is only natural that the Syriac word for "God" viz. allāhā would be presented in Arabic by allâh. This led to the identification of Allâh with the God of the Bible, an identification which was in a way accidental<sup>240)</sup>. Thus it is not surprising to encounter the name Allâh in the poetry of Christians like the renowned 'Adî ibn Zaid<sup>241)</sup>. In fact the Koran itself accepts a priori that the Christians worship Allâh<sup>242)</sup>. This confluence of the Syriac and Arabic words facilitated the spread of monotheistic ideas and the association of such ideas with Allâh.

#### I. Pre-Islamic use of the name Allâh by Jews in Arabia:

In the introduction to his Jewish Wars, written during the last quarter of the first century A.D., the Jewish historiographer Flavius Josephus<sup>243)</sup> refers to Arabs interested in the history of the Jewish revolt. This evidence points to the presence of a more or less substantial



number of Jews among the Arabs. The loyalty of Samau'al ibn c^Adiyâ a Jewish poet from Taima, to the north of Madîna, became proverbial in Arabic, while the Koran LXXXV, 4ff. commentates on the persecution of the Christians by the Jewish king Dhû Nuwâs. In fact the name Madîna is an Aramaic loanword<sup>244)</sup> which became the regular name of Yathrib due to the strong Jewish element in the town<sup>245)</sup>. Evidence of Jewish presence in Arabia can be multiplied. In this context it is interesting to add only that the Sifre on Deuteronomy, a Tannaitic Midrash dating from the second or third century A.D., in its commentary on Deutr. 32:2 states that God revealed Himself by giving the Torah in four languages viz. Hebrew, Greek, Arabic and Aramaic<sup>246)</sup>.

Rahmân, the name used instead of the proper name of God in the Babilonian Talmud, was according to the South Arabian inscriptions also the name used by the Jews in Arabia<sup>247)</sup>. In Arabic poetry of Jewish origin the name Allâh is used without any restriction causing one to think that they did not equal it with the proper name Yahwè but rather identified it with the Hebrew hā, 'ē, lōhîm<sup>248)</sup>. The Koran leaves no doubt that Allâh was also the name of the God of the Jews<sup>249)</sup>. Mohammed was well aware of the use of the name Rahmân by the Jews — as a matter of fact he himself used this name at one stage of his career<sup>250)</sup>. He explained that believers may use either the name Allâh or the name Rahmân for they are both most beautiful names of the same God<sup>251)</sup>. Without any doubt the Jewish idea of God was already present in Arabia in pre-Islamic times and associated with the name Allâh.

J. The Hanîfs:

Under the term Hanîf we understand people who repudiated idolatry and held the same religious convictions Mohammed was later to propagate. Though they were generally neither Jews nor Christians, they were certainly influenced by these monotheists. One of the most important Hanîfs was Umâiyya ibn Abî al-Salt. His verses express his belief in the only god, Allâh, creator and lord of the world, while his terminology is the same as that of the Koran. He believed in the resurrection, in the final judgement, in Paradise and in Hell. In addition to unmistakable heathen concepts, the Biblical narrative found an important place in his poetry. He was never converted to Islam but his teachings are so close to the Koran that many scholars believe that at least a great deal is forgery<sup>252</sup>).

Similarly Zaid ibn <sup>c</sup>Amr ibn Nufail rejected the gods of his people in favour of Allâh, following the religion of Abraham. Zaid proclaimed that Allâh requites man according to his deeds and nothing can be hidden from him. There is no god beside Allâh. By implication Zaid named him as creator. He died before the advent of Islam but Mohammed acknowledged him as a forerunner by allowing prayers to be said on his behalf<sup>253</sup>).

One more Hanîf worthy of mention is Waraqa ibn Naufal, a man well-versed in the Torah and the Gospel. He

called himself a warner from Allâh, the creator of man and lord of the throne. Allâh is the sovereign of all that is under the heavens who will remain when everything else has perished. He was related to the Prophet and as such exercised an important influence on Mohammed<sup>254</sup>).

In the preceding pages we traced the character of Allâh from sources of diverse background. In a following and concluding chapter we will have the opportunity to present a synthesis of the evidence. It should however be realised that a synthesis of all the details of the mentioned sources into a single concept will give an artificial and even untrue picture of Allâh before the Islam. In other words: The name Allâh had more than one connotation in pre-Islamic Arabia, the exact meaning depending on the context of its use. Nevertheless the observant reader will have noticed a remarkable recurrence of the same basic conception of Il / Allâh, despite the diversity of the sources and whatever their particular differentiating views may have been. In fact a synthesis was begun by the Hanîfs and consummated by Mohammed. Thus as far as the name Allâh is concerned Islam was the necessary outcome of the situation in Arabia around 600 A.D.