

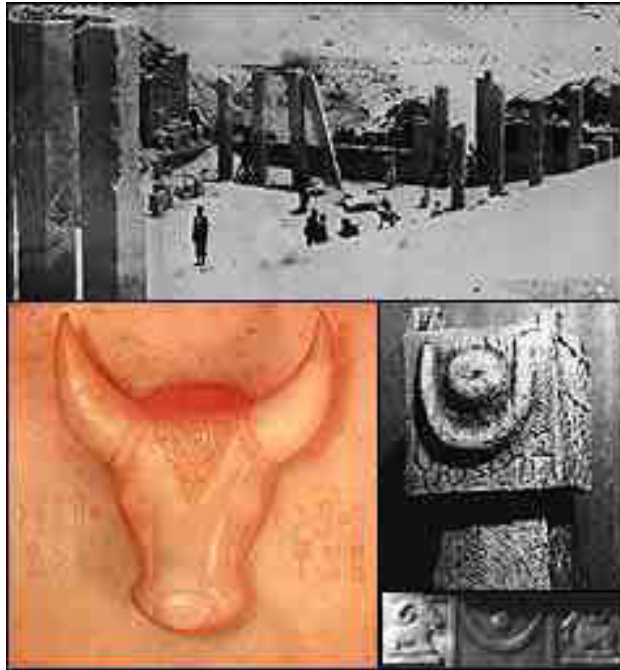
# Arab Religion before Islam

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## *'Illumquh of the Sabeans*

Sheba is the Anglicized Hebrew spelling of Saba, the name of an ancient southwest Arabian kingdom roughly corresponding to the modern territory of Yemen, originally settled by Semites from western or central Arabia during the middle of the 2nd millennium BC. Excavations at Ma'rib, its capital, during the 20th century have revealed an imposing temple to the moon god. Like the sabbath it has a meaning of "seven".



Temple of 'Iluṃquh at Marib Yemen, Sabean Moon Bull, Incense Holder Aksum, Moon and Orb of Venus Sabean wall frieze (Doe).

"The South Arabians before Islam were polytheists and revered a large number of deities. Most of these were astral in concept but the significance of only a few is known. It was essentially a planetary system in which the moon as a masculine deity prevailed. This, combined with the use of a star calendar by the agriculturists of certain parts, particularly in the Hadramaut, indicates that there was an early reverence for the night sky. Amongst the South Arabians the worship of the moon continued, and it is almost certain that their religious calendar was also lunar and that their years were calculated by the position of the moon. The national god of each of the kingdoms or states was the Moon-god known by various names: 'Iluṃquh by the Sabaeans, 'Amm and 'Anbay by the Qatabanians, Wadd (love) by the Minaeans, and Sin by the Hadramis". The term 'God is Love' is characteristic of Wadd (Briffault 3/85). 'the Merciful' ascribed to Allah is also South Arabian (Pritchard).

The sun-goddess was the moon's consort; she was perhaps best known in South Arabia as Dhat Hamym, 'she who sends forth strong rays of benevolence'. Another dominant deity was the male god known as Athtar corresponding to Phoenician Astarte (Doe 25). Pritchard (61) claims their pantheon included the the moon god Sin

etc., Shams (Shamash) and Athtar or Astarte as in the Semitic trinity, however it would appear that the sun was female as the Canaanite Shapash who figures in Ugarit myth alongside Athtar (Driver 110).

The earliest temple known is the Mahram Bilquis or Harem of the Queen of Sheba, previously called the Awwam the temple of the Moon God 'Illumquh which dates from around 700 BC, although its lower levels may be substantially older. Sabean moon worship extended through a long period of time to around 400 AD when it was overtaken by resurgent Judaism and Christianity around a century before Muhammad.

## **Bilqis the Sun-worshipper of Islam**

Bilquis was the Queen of the Sabeans in Solomons time. Pre-Islamic poetry describes Solomon as a king of universal kingdom of men, djinn and winds etc. nine angels stand before him. He built the castle al-Ablaq near Taima.



Sabean Votive Offerings with a black Shulamite (Doe)

Diodorus Siculus notes: "This tribe [the Sabaeans] surpasses not only the neighbouring Arabs but also all other men in wealth and in their several extravagancies besides. For in the exchange and sale of their wares they, of all men who carry on trade for the sake of the silver they receive in exchange, obtain the highest price in return for things of the smallest weight. Consequently, since they have never for ages suffered the ravages of war because of their secluded position, and since an abundance of both gold and silver

abounds in the country, ... they have embossed goblets of every description, made of silver and gold, couches and tripods with silver feet, and every other furnishing of incredible costliness, and halls encircled by large columns, some of them gilded, and others having silver figures on the capitals. Their ceilings and doors they partitioned by means of panels and coffers made of gold, set with precious stones and placed close together, and have thus made the structure of their houses in every part marvellous for its costliness; for some parts they have constructed of silver and gold, others of ivory and the most showy precious stones or of whatever else men esteem most highly" (Pritchard 1974 44). Their sculpture and votive offerings were refined.

Strabo noted that the king of Saba who "presides over the court of justice and other things" was not permitted to leave the palace, for if he did "the people would at once stone him, in consequence of a saying of an oracle" (Pritchard 1974 66).



Sabean jewelery in gold carnelian and onyx (Doe).  
Statue, Sabean script, and a decorative panel in marble (Doe).

While her tomb and documents of her time have yet to come to light, and remains of the tenth century BC are still largely unknown to archaeology, the recovery of a small amount of contemporary evidence together with a considerable amount of material from only three or four centuries later enables us to reconstruct a general outline of the Queen of Sheba's culture with considerable probability. She would have lived surrounded by the accoutrements

of an affluent civilization: a thriving trade that brought unparalleled prosperity; an irrigation agriculture that provided ample subsistence; a distinctive architecture in stone that was second only to that of Egypt in the ancient Near East in its execution and variety of ornamentation; a richness in metallurgy and stone carving as well as an abundance of artists and artisans who pursued these vocations; a high degree of literacy among the people, who had a keen appreciation of the importance of a written language and of their beautiful alphabetic script; and an art that is representational in a symbolic archaic manner (Pritchard 40).

"The great civilization of South Arabia was little known to the Arabs of Muhammad's time [although] any of the Arab tribes of Muhammad's day still had a tradition that they had lived in South Arabia before taking to the desert when the old civilization declined." Some tribes retained a memory of being settled there before conditions worsened, apparently connected with the Marib dam bursting and a return to nomadic life. Restorations were known to have been carried out in 450 and 542 which puts a final date on the demise (Pritchard 1974 88).

Sura 34:15 states: "Certainly there was a sign for Saba in their abode; two gardens on the right and the left; eat of the sustenance of your Lord and give thanks to Him: a good land and a Forgiving Lord! But they turned aside, so We sent upon them a torrent of which the rush could not be withstood, and in place of their two gardens We gave to them two gardens yielding bitter fruit and (growing) tamarisk and a few lote-trees."



The hoopoe visits Nikaulis to entice her to Solomon (Lassner). Sura 27:15-44 relates many of the episodes already found for example in the Targum Sheni, a further indication of the familiarity Muhammad had with details of Jewish literature outside the Pentateuch. Rather than Bilqis being portrayed as a demon, Solomon is portrayed as a great man of God and master of the Djinn to whom Bilqis submits in acknowledgement of al-Llah. The story of Solomon sending the Hoopoe in a flock of bird to summon the Queen is told. The people of Sheba are said to be sun-worshippers. Her throne is disguised and placed before her as a test. She says "It is like it' evasively. As she walks on to the palace: 44 "She though it a pool and uncovered her legs. Solomon said 'It is a place paved with glass.' She said 'I have wronged myself to God, Lord of the worlds, with Solomon I make submission.' "

### *al-Lat, al-Uzza and Dhu Shara: the Deities of Nabatea*

A second prominent Arab culture had sprung up from Southern Sinai around 600 BC and from around 400 BC in the land of the Edomites in Jordan. The Nabateans had a close relationship with the Edomites as they each claim a female line of descent from Ishmael, through Bashemath one of the three wives of Esau and her sister Nabaioth respectively (Browning 32), conditions favourable to integration. This also gave the Edomites descent from Isaac through Esau. The son of Esau and Bashemath was Ruel the Midianite father in Law of Moses.



Moon and Sun deities surmounted by the Eagle. Al-Uzza as Moon Goddess commands the Zodiac surmounted by the moon and carrying a moon staff. The temple of Manatu at Petra. Dionysian tragic mask with dolphins. Grape freeze (centre). Aretas IV and Shaqilat II (Glueck).

The Nabateans migrated from Arabia as shepherds and caravan traders who benefited from horse breeding and settled adaptably to form rich irrigated productive land with a prominent trade, centred on the previously unpopulated area round Petra - 'a rose red city half as old as time'. During the time of Jesus, Nabatea was an independent Kingdom with influence spreading to Damascus. Herod was involved in hostilities with Aretas IV the King of Nabatea because Herodias displaced Aretas's daughter as Herod's wife. Although they were annexed by the Romans they continued to be a significant Arab power to the time of Muhammad.

Herodotus says of the Arabs: "They deem no other to be gods save Dionysus and Heavenly Aphrodite ... they call Dionysus Orotalt and Aphrodite Alilat" (Negev 101). In Sumeria Allatu or 'goddess' is an epithet of Ereshkigal the chthonic goddess of the underworld. Like El and al-Llah which simply means god, al-Lat 'goddess' could be identified with many female deities, and indeed Allat is identified with Aphrodite-Venus (Negev 112). It is said that when Allat became the goddess of the Nabateans, she became al-Uzza the 'mighty one' as she evolved from a local deity into a patron of an expanding culture (Browning 47). We have seen that al-Uzza is also referred to in connection with the Bedouins at Harran, where it is

said Bedouins sacrificed Christian virgins caught in battle to the Goddess (Green T 62).



Horned stele with Qos-allah, Seal attributed to Edomite Qaush, Djin block (Glueck, Browning).

Nabatean inscriptions in Sinai and other places display widespread references to names including Allah, El and Allat (god and goddess) , with regional references to al-Uzza, Baal and Manutu (Manat) (Negev 11). Allat is also found in Sinai in South Arabian language. Allah occurs particularly as Garm-'allahi - god dedided (Greek Garmelos) and Aush-allahi - 'gods covenant' (Greek Ausallos). We find both Shalm-lahi 'Allah is peace' and Shalm-allat, 'the peace of the goddess'. We also find Amat-allahi 'she-servant of god' and Halaf-llahi 'the successor of Allah'.

A stele is dedicated to Qos-allah 'Qos is Allah' or 'Qos the god', by Qosmilk (melech - king) is found at Petra (Glueck 516). Qos is identifiable with Kaush (Qaush) the God of the older Edomites. The stele is horned and the a seal from Edomite Tawilan near Petra identified with Kaush displays a star and crescent (Browning 28), both consistent with a moon diety. It is conceivable the latter could have resulted from trade with Harran (Bartlett 194). There is continuing debate about the nature of Qos (qaus - bow) who has been identified both with a hunting bow (hunting god) and a rainbow (weather god) although the crescent above is also a bow. There is no reference to Qos in the Old Testament, but Seir is one of the domains of Yahweh, suggesting a close relationship. His attributes in inscriptions include knowing, striking down, giving and light (Bartlett203). Attempts have been made to also explain the existence of this scarab in the light of trade with Harran for which



evidence has been found in cuneiform tablets (Bartlett 194).

The Nabateans had two principal gods in their pantheon, and a whole range of djinns, personal gods and spirits similar to angels. These deities were Dhu Shara, or Duchares and al-Uzza. Duchares means Lord of Shera (Seir), a local mountain and thunder god who was worshipped at a rock high place as a block of stone frequently squared, just as Hermes was the four-square god. Suidas in the tenth century AD described it as a 'cubic' black stone of dimension 4x2x1 (Browning 44). All the deities male and female were represented as stones or god-blocks.



The treasury at Petra. Al-Uzza as grain goddess and as Mari the sea goddess crowned by dolphins. (Glueck, Browning)

Duchares was a Zeus-like mountain deity of Jebel Shara, with associations with sacred kingship whose rites took a prominent place in the scheme of worship. Notably King Obodas became Zeus Oboda (Negev 111). He is described on a dam inscription as 'Dushara the god of Gaia' (Negev 107). He was celebrated as a god of immortality celebrated by a Dionysian tragic mask of death, in which its wearer became united with him, thus escaping the limitations of the mortal span (Glueck 242). He is surrounded by dolphins as was Dionysus.

Al-Uzza was a deity of springs and water, as befits a fertility goddess, and as such she would have been revered in Petra with particular devotion" (Browning 47). Manathu (the Manat of Islam) was the patron goddess of Petra, being Fortuna having a similar role to Semitic Gad (Browning 48). As Moon Goddess Tyche she was also

Fortune holding a cornucopia of overflowing fruit.

The Nabateans originally were tent-dwelling shepherds renowned, like their fellow tribe the Recchabites, for eschewing houses, planted crops or wine, in their case on penalty of death (Negev 101), a sentiment shared by Muhammad, who looked with contempt upon the Kuryshites and Ansari "for they employ themselves with sowing seeds" ... "The divine glory is among the shepherds, vanity and impudence among the agricultural peoples" (Briffault 3/111).

However agricultural settlement brought changes and the Greek period produced a hybrid culture. Al-Uzza became identified with Atargatis-Aphrodite and Duchares with Dionysus. Freezes including grape vines are prominent, consistent with Dionysian rites, which Browning (47) concedes may have become the "pornographic pop concerts which came to debase the once-glorious cult of Dionysos." Glueck (166) is even more forthright: "Rich food in plenty and strong wine without stint helped bring the deities and their worshippers into fervid relationship. Bar-Hebraeus quoted Psalm 12:8 of Nabatean women "the wicked walk on every side while vileness is exalted among the sons of men". The scope and nature of the temples supports both males and females being worshippers of the cults.



The Mensa Sacra at Petra and the great high place at Khirbet Tannur (Browning, Glueck)

The Nabateans, like the Harranians, followed a complex system of astral worship, involving the sun and moon and seven major planets, in which in her varying forms, the Goddess represented Venus and the Moon (Glueck 453). As Moon Goddess she is identifiable with Tyche, Selene and Atargatis-Artemis of Hierapolis.

Selene was worshipped in the new and full moon. She stands *prima inter pares* at the centre of the main dieties of the Nabatean pantheon the seven planets and the zodiac, although sometimes displaced by Zeus. The snake twined eagle is shown in at least one relief standing above both the sun and moon at Jebel Druze. However the fertility goddess, who was also in her aspects the dolphin-crowned Sea Goddess (Aphrodite-Mari) of seafarers and the Moon Goddess clearly dominates the sculptures at Khirbet Tannur, the outstanding Nabataean high sanctuary, archetypal of the biblical high places (Glueck).

Women played a significant role in Nabatean society. Aretas IV was on coinage with Shaqilat I, while Malichus II was alongside Shaqilat II. "Married women could bequeath and hold property and genealogy was sometimes traced through the maternal line. Pagan temples, whether inside or outside the Nabataean kingdom were dedicated to both Dushara and Allat or to localized equivalents of Zues Hadad and Atargatis. Indeed in general, Atargatis seems to have outranked her consort by far" (Glueck 166).

### *The Many Deities of the Environs of Mecca*

There are fewer archaeological remains of the deities of Mecca, and much of the information about them comes from Muslim historians such as al-Kalbi<sup>1</sup>.

Pre-islamic worship of the goddess seems to be primarily associated with Al'Lat, which simply means 'goddess'. She is a triple goddess, similar to the Greek lunar deity Kore/Demeter/Hecate. Each aspect of this trinity corresponds to a phase of the moon. In the same way Al'Lat has three names known to the initiate: Q're, the crescent moon or the maiden; Al'Uzza, literally 'the strong one' who is the full moon and the mother aspect; then Al'Menat, the waning but wise goddess of fate, prophecy and divination. Islamic tradition continue to recognise these three but labels them 'daughters of Allah', or *banat al-Llah*, firmly associating al-Llah as a pre-Islamic deity paired with the three forms of the Goddess.

According to Edward Rice<sup>2</sup>, as quoted in Campenhausen<sup>3</sup> Al'Uzza was especially worshipped at the Ka'bah where she was served by

seven priestesses. Her worshippers circled the holy stone seven times - once for each of the ancient seven planets - and did so in total nudity. Near the Ka'bah is the well, Zamzam, which cools the throats of the countless millions of pilgrims.

Dawood says that Al'Lat, Al'Uzza, and Manat 'represented the Sun, Venus, and Fortune respectively'<sup>4</sup>, but Allat is also described as a representation of Venus<sup>5</sup>, and she once had a temple in the precinct devoted to the sun-god Shamash in Hatra, Iraq<sup>6</sup>. In early Mesopotamian art, the only heavenly bodies regularly shown as a group were the triad of Sun, Moon, and Venus, the three most important celestial lights; and in Sumer and early Babylon the sun and moon were represented mainly by a male divinity, though elsewhere in the Semitic world the moon was usually regarded as feminine.

In Islam, the moon is considered holiest astronomical object, and moon is the guiding light of all Islamic rituals/festivals. The crescent moon and stars are the symbolic sign in the national flags of many Muslim countries, and it is present over the Mosques, in the Muslim graveyard and so on. The Moon was also male divinity in ancient Semitic religion, and the Arabic word for the moon "qamar" is of the masculine gender, on the other hand, the Arabic word for sun "shams" is feminine gender, reflecting the pattern in Sa'aba.

Al'Uzza and Manat are less easily traced to a more archaic source. Their names - 'the Strong' and 'Destiny' respectively - suggest abstract forces rather than natural objects. If the three 'daughters of Allah' are personifications of any natural phenomena, then one is surely the Earth (Al'Lat = Allatu = Ereshkigal); the others are of uncertain pedigree. But there is also a strong chance that their form and function were influenced by the banat, the three daughters of Baal, the supreme deity of the Canaanites. They symbolised light, rain, and earth<sup>7</sup>

In Arabian archaeology a large number of inscriptions on rocks, tablets and walls, have pointed to the worship of a family of four; one male and his three 'daughters' or goddesses. Those three goddesses are sometimes engraved together with Allah,

represented by a crescent moon above them. But Allah was the 'Lord of the Kaaba... Lord of Manat, al-Lat, and al-Uzza...and even as 'Lord of Sirius'.'(Peters, Muhammad, 98.) His 'daughters' were his associates, helpers and were themselves worshipped, after the manner of ancient Babylonian customs and symbolised by astronomical symbols.

Every family in Mecca had at home an idol which they worshiped. Whenever one of them purposed to set out on a journey, his last act before leaving the house would be to touch the idol in hope of an auspicious journey; and on his return, the first thing he would do was to touch it again in gratitude for a propitious return.

The Arabs were passionately fond of worshiping idols. Some of them took unto themselves a temple around which they centered their worship, while others adopted an idol to which they offered their adoration. The person who was unable to build himself a temple or adopt an idol would erect a stone in front of the Sacred House or in front of any other temple which he might prefer, and then circumambulate it in the same manner in which he would circumambulate the Sacred House. The Arabs called these stones baetyls (ansab). Whenever these stones resembled a living form they called them 'idols (asnam) and images (awthan). The act of circumambulating them they called circumrotation (dawar).

Whenever a traveler stopped at a place or station in order to rest or spend the night, he would select for himself four stones, pick out the finest among them and adopt it as his god, and use the remaining three as supports for his cooking-pot. On his departure he would leave them behind, and would do the same on his other stops.

The Arabs were wont to offer sacrifices before all these idols, baetyls, and stones. Nevertheless they were aware of the excellence and superiority of the Ka'bah, to which they went on pilgrimage and visitation. What they did on their travels was a perpetuation of what they did at the Ka'bah, because of their devotion to it.

The sheep which they offered and slaughtered before their (34 idols and baetyls were called sacrifices (ata'ir, sing. atirah); the place on

which they slaughtered and offered the sacrifice was called an altar, ('itr). In this connection Zuhayr ibn-abi-Sulma[94] said:

*"He moved therefrom and reached a mountain top,  
Like a high altar sprinkled with the blood of sacrifice."*

The banu-Mulayh of the Khuza'ah [tribe] (they are the kindreds of Talhat a-Talahat [or al-Talhat]) were wont to worship the jinn. In reference to them the following verse was revealed: "Truly they worship ye call on besides God, are, like yourselves, his servants."

According to Islamic Theologians (Mullahs, Maulana, Moulavis, etc.), or Islamic teachings— Allah is the supreme God or creator who, in the manner of a revealed God acting in history, talked or introduced Himself with Prophet Muhammad through an Angel named Gabriel, disclosing the truth that it is the Allah who created everything in the universe, right from the time when Gabriel disclosed the 'truth' to Muhammad in the mountain cave of Hira Parvat and gave Muhammad the Quran. They believe that before this truth was revealed—pagan Arabs were in the total darkness (Andhakar Zuug) and they used to worship various puppet goddess and that the pagans were very evil people.

This picture is however inaccurate. "Allah" was a pre-existing deity in pagan Arabia<sup>8</sup>. In pre-Islamic days, that Muslims call the Days of ignorance, the religious background of the Arabs was pagan, and basically animistic. Through Moon, Sun, Stars, Planets, Animals, wells, trees, stones, caves, springs, and other natural objects man could make contact with the deity. At Mekka, "Allah" was the chief of the gods and the special deity of the Quraish, the prophet's tribe. Allah had three daughters: Al Uzzah (Venus) most revered of all and pleased with human sacrifice; Manah, the goddess of destiny, and Al Lat, the goddess of vegetable life. The three daughters of Allah were considered very powerful over all things. Therefore, their intercessions on behalf of their worshippers were of great significance.

Moreover, the allegation by some historians and Islamists, such as Montgomery Watt, that the Meccan Quraysh lacked compassion for

the poor or were a disintegrating society are without substance (Crone 1987). The indications are rather that they remained economically buoyant and that social inequality did not lead to the disintegration of pre-Islamic society in favour of the umma. Furthermore the Muslim-inspired notion that the Arabs were originally monotheists of Abraham's religion, who later degenerated into polythesitic paganism, and hence that the Ka'aba is the ordained house of God, has no historical, or archaeological basis. Rather, the patriarchs worshipped El at stone bethels just as the pre-Islamic Arabians.

## **Manat**

The most ancient of all these idols was Manah. The Arabs used to name [their children] 'Abd-Manah and Zayd-Manah. Manah was erected on the seashore in the vicinity of al-Mushallal in Qudayd, between Medina and Mecca. All the Arabs used to venerate her and sacrifice before her. [In particular] the Aws and the Khazraj, as well as the inhabitants of Medina and Mecca and their vicinities, used to venerate Manah, sacrifice before her, and bring unto her their offerings. The Aws and the Khazraj, as well as those Arabs among the people of Yathrib[12] and other places who took to their way of life, were wont to go on pilgrimage and observe the vigil at all the appointed places, but not shave their heads. At the end of the pilgrimage, however, when they were about to return home, they would set out to the place where Manah stood, shave their heads, and stay there a while. They did not consider their pilgrimage completed until they visited Manah. Because of this veneration of Manah by the Awa and the Khazraj, 'Abd-al-'Uzza ibn-Wadi'ah al-Muzani, or some other Arab, said:

*"An oath, truthful and just, I swore  
By Manah, at the sacred place of the Khazraj."*

The Quraysh as well as the rest of the Arabs continued to venerate Manah until the Apostle of God set out from Medina in the eighth year of the Hijrah, the year in which God accorded him the victory. When he was at a distance of four or five nights from Medina, he

dispatched 'Ali to destroy her. 'Ali demolished her, took away all her [treasures], and carried them back to the Prophet.

## **al-Lat**

They then adopted Allat as their goddess. Allat stood in al-Ta'if, and was more recent than Manah. She was a cubic rock beside which a certain Jew used to prepare his barley porridge (sawiq). Her custody was in the hands of the banu-'Attab ibn-Malik of the Thaqif, who had built an edifice over her. The Quraysh, as well as all the Arabs, were wont to venerate Allat. They also used to name their children after her, calling them Zayd-Allat and Taym-Allat. She stood in the place of the left-hand side minaret of the present-day mosque of al-Ta'if.

Allat continued to be venerated until the Thaqif embraced Islam, when the Apostle of God dispatched al-Mughirah ibn-Shu'bab, who destroyed her and burnt her [temple] to the ground.

Aws ibn-Hajar, swearing by Allat, said:

*"By Allat and al-'Uzza and those who in them believe,  
And by Allah, verily He is greater than both."*

## **al-Uzza**

She is, in point of time, more recent than either Allat or Manah. The Arabs named their children after the latter two before they named them after al-'Uzza. Her idol was situated in a valley in Nakhlat al-Sha'miyah called Hurad, alongside al-Ghumayr' to the right of the road from Mecca to al-'Iraq. Over her Zilim ibn-As'ad built a house called Buss in which the people used to receive oracular communications. The Arabs as well as the Quraysh were wont to name their children 'Abd-al-'Uzza. Furthermore al-'Uzza was the greatest idol among the Quraysh. They used to journey to her, offer gifts unto her, and seek her favours through sacrifice.

Ishaq:38 "Luhayy put Al-Uzza in a Nakhla Taghut. When they had finished their Ka'ba Hajj they circumambulated Al-Uzza. The



Quraysh worshiped her. Manat was worshiped by the Aus and Khazraj in Yathrib."

Ishaq:39 Those who prayed to Al-Uzza and Manat, "shaved their heads and completed all of the rites associated with the Hajj."

*"We were in the Prophet's company in the middle of the lunar month. He looked at the moon and said, 'You will see your Lord as you see this moon.'"*<sup>9</sup>

We have been told that the Apostle of God once mentioned al-Uzza saying, "I have offered a white sheep to al-'Uzza, while I was a follower of the religion of my people."

The Quraysh were wont to circumambulate the Ka'bah and say:

*"By Allat and al-'Uzza,  
And Manah, the third idol besides.  
Verily they are the most exalted females  
Whose intercession is to be sought."*

The Quraysh had dedicated to it, in the valley of Hurad, a ravine (shi'b) called Suqam and were wont to vie there with the Sacred Territory of the Ka'bah. She also had a place of sacrifice called al-Ghabghab where they offered their oblations. It was customary to divide the flesh of the sacrifice among those who had offered it and among those present at the ceremony. The Quraysh were wont to venerate her above all other idols.

In the year of the victory ('am al-fath), the Prophet summoned Khalid ibn-al-Walid and said unto him, "Go unto a tree in the valley of Nakhlah and cut it down." Khalid went thereto, captured Dubayyah, who was the custodian of al-'Uzza, and killed him. Abu-Khirash al-Hudhali said lamenting Dubayyah:

*"What is wrong with Dubayyah? For days I have not seen him  
Amid the wine-bibbers; he drew not nigh, he did not appear.  
If he were living I would have come with a cup*

*Of the banu-Hatif make, filled with  
Bacchus oil. Generous and noble is he; no sooner his wine cups  
Are filled than they become empty, like an old tank full of  
holes in the midst of winter.*

*Suqam has become desolate, deserted by  
all of its friends, except the wild beasts and the wind which  
blows through its empty chambers."*

When the Prophet captured Mecca, he dispatched Khalid ibn-al-Walid saying, "Go to the valley of Nakhlah; there you will find three trees. Cut down the first one." Khalid went and cut it down. On his return to report, the Prophet asked him saying, "Have you seen anything there?" Khalid replied and said, "No." The Prophet ordered him to return and cut down the second tree. He went and cut it down. On his return to report the Prophet asked him a second time, "Have you seen anything there?" Khalid answered, "No." Thereupon the Prophet ordered him to go back and cut down the third tree. When Khalid arrived on the scene he found an Abyssinian woman with dishevelled hair and her hands placed on her shoulder[s], gnashing and grating her teeth. Behind her stood Dubayyah al-Sulami who was then the custodian of al-'Uzza. When Dubayyah saw Khalid approaching, he said:

*"O thou al-'Uzza! Remove thy veil and tuck up thy sleeves;  
Summon up thy strength and deal Khalid an unmistakable blow.  
For unless thou killest him this very day,  
Thou shalt be doomed to ignominy and shame."*

Thereupon Khalid replied:

*"O al-'Uzza! May thou be blasphemed, not exalted!  
Verily I see that God hath abased thee."*

Turning to the woman, he dealt her a blow which severed her head in twain, and lo, she crumbled into ashes. He then cut down the tree and killed Dubayyah the custodian, after which he returned to the Prophet and reported to him his exploit. Thereupon the Prophet said, "That was al-'Uzza. But she is no more. The Arabs shall have none after her. Verily she shall never be worshipped again." Consequently abu-Khirash composed the preceding verses in lamentation of Dubayyah.

Abu-al-Mundhir said: The Quraysh as well as the other Arabs who inhabited Mecca did not offer to any of the idols anything similar to their veneration of al-'Uzza. The next in order of veneration was Allat and then Manah. Al-'Uzza, however, received from the Quraysh the exclusive honor of visitation and sacrifice. This, I believe, was because of her close proximity. The Thaqif, on the other hand, were wont to offer Manah the exclusive honor [of visitation and sacrifice], in the same way the Quraysh offered it to al-'Uzza, while the Aws and the Khazraj favored Manah therewith. All of them, though, venerated al-'Uzza. They did not, however, hold the same regard, or anything approaching it, for the five idols which were introduced by 'Amr ibn-Luhayy. These are the five idols which God mentioned in the glorious Koran when He said, "Forsake not Wadd nor Suwa', nor Yaghuth and Ya'us and Nasr." This, I believe, was because of their distance from them.

## Hubal

Hubal is an Aramaic word, meaning vapour or spirit. Some opinions favour an association of Hubal with Canaanite Ba'al. Others liken it to Cybele. Bearing in mind that Q're was also an Arabian Goddess, the influence of Greece and Anatolia through Nabatea is a natural conclusion.

The Quraysh had also several idols in and around the Ka'bah. The greatest of these was Hubal. It was, as I was told, of red agate, in the form of a man with the right hand broken off. It came into the possession of the Quraysh in this condition, and they, therefore, made for it a hand of gold. The first to set it up [for worship] was Khuzaymah ibn-Mudrikah ibn-al-Ya's' ibn-Mudar. Consequently it used to be called Khuzaymah's Hubal.

It stood inside the Ka'bah. In front of it were seven divination arrows (sing. qidh, pl. qidah or aqduh). On one of these arrows was written "pure" (sarih), and on another "consociated alien" (mulsag). Whenever the lineage of a new-born was doubted, they would offer a sacrifice to it [Hubal] and then shuffle the arrows and throw them. If the arrows showed the word "pure," the child would be declared legitimate and the tribe would accept him. If, however, the arrows

showed the words "consociated alien," the child would be declared illegitimate and the tribe would reject him. The third arrow was for divination concerning the dead, while the fourth was for divination concerning marriage. The purpose of the three remaining arrows has not been explained. Whenever they disagreed concerning something, or purposed to embark upon a journey, or undertake some project, they would proceed to it [Hubal] and shuffle the divination arrows before it. Whatever result they obtained they would follow and do accordingly.

Another tradition<sup>10</sup> says that the idol Hubal was found out with its right hand mutilated by a man named Khuzaima bin Mudrika and he joining to it a right hand made of gold, installed it in the centre of the Ka'ba, where it was worshipped and therefore was called Hubal Khuzaima. It was an idol of Banu Kinana.] Beside it were laid the ritual arrows of divination. On both sides of it were placed the two gold images of deers. Nearby were standing the imageries of the Prophets Abraham and Ishmael with seven divining arrows in their hands and also the idol of Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus in her affectionate embrace. Year in and year out people, were surging there to worship. Both men and women stepping out of their clothings and, rubbing shoulders with each other made seven rounds of the Ka'ba, fell prostrate before the idols and invoked their blessings and benedictions. After the episode of Abraha, the Quraish priding themselves as the people of the sanctuary imposed many a restriction on others who came to Mecca from outside for worship. The outsiders were neither allowed to bring their food inside the sacred territory nor permitted to go round the Ka'ba wearing their own clothings. The Quraish supplied them clothings but if they had none, they (the outsiders) were asked to go round the Ka'ba naked. The men circumambulated the Ka'ba completely naked while women were wearing a piece of cloth in front and back and having one hand in front and the other behind.] Not satisfied with this numerality of idols and plurality of gods each and every family had established separately an idol in its home as its private deity. Some of them were like blooming girls, some of them were like ferocious lions and some of them were like rapacious vultures and so on. They worshipped them by whistling through their fingers and clapping

their hands. (Q. 8:35)

When they went out on a journey the last thing they did was rubbing against their family deity and when they returned the first thing they did was also the same. They carried with them along with the articles of travel four crude stones, three to form oven and the one to worship. If they were unable to carry four they would take one of the stones used for oven and worship it with great piety and veneration.

Men in every walk of life had their idols installed in the Ka'ba. The corn merchants had their idol made of flour. If there was any famine they, greatly irked by its inability to help them in their hour of stress, would break it to pieces and swallow it up. When the pilgrims did not find out any wood to feed their oven in rainy days they would break the wooden idols installed there and use them as, firewood instead to bake their bread and cook their curry.

Another divinatory tradition among the Arabs was casting of Azlam (i.e. featherless arrows which were of three kinds: one showing 'yes', another 'no' and a third was blank) which they used to do in case of serious matters like travel, marriage and the like. If the lot showed 'yes', they would do, if 'no', they would delay for the next year. Other kinds of Azlam were cast for water, blood-money or showed 'from you', 'not from you', or 'Mulsaq' (consociated). In cases of doubt in filiation they would resort to the idol of Hubal, with a hundred-camel gift, for the arrow caster. Only the arrows would then decide the sort of relationship. If the arrow showed (from you), then it was decided that the child belonged to the tribe; if it showed (from others), he would then be regarded as an ally, but if (consociated) appeared, the person would retain his position but with no lineage or alliance contract. [Muhadrat Tareekh Al-Umam Al-Islamiyah 1/56; Ibn Hisham 1/152,153]

This was very much like gambling and arrow-shafting whereby they used to divide the meat of the camels they slaughtered according to this tradition.

Moreover, they used to have a deep conviction in the tidings of soothsayers, diviners and astrologers. A soothsayer used to traffic in

the business of foretelling future events and claim knowledge of private secrets and having jinn subordinates who would communicate the news to him. Some soothsayers claimed that they could uncover the unknown by means of a granted power, while other diviners boasted they could divulge the secrets through a cause-and-effect-inductive process that would lead to detecting a stolen commodity, location of a theft, a stray animal, and the like. The astrologer belonged to a third category who used to observe the stars and calculate their movements and orbits whereby he would foretell the future. [Mirqat Al-Mafateeh 2/2,3] Lending credence to this news constituted a clue to their conviction that attached special significance to the movements of particular stars with regard to rainfall. [Muslim with An-Nawawi 1/59]

The belief in signs as betokening future events, was, of course common among the Arabians. Some days and months and particular animals were regarded as ominous. They also believed that the soul of a murdered person would fly in the wilderness and would never rest at rest until revenge was taken. Superstition was rampant. Should a deer or bird, when released, turn right then what they embarked on would be regarded auspicious, otherwise they would get pessimistic and withhold from pursuing it. [Bukhari with footnotes of Ahmad Ali Saharanpuri 2/851,857]

People of pre-Islamic period practised devotion to the Holy Sanctuary, circumambulation, observance of pilgrimage, the vigil on 'Arafah and offering sacrifices. Muslim authors claim the Quraysh would refrain from going to 'Arafah with the crowd, instead they would stop short at Muzdalifah.

They would not eat dried yoghurt or cooked fat, nor would they enter a tent made of camel hair or seek shade unless in a house of adobe bricks, so long as they were committed to the intention of pilgrimage. They also, out of a deeply-rooted misconception, denied pilgrims, other than Makkans, access to the food they had brought when they wanted to make pilgrimage or lesser pilgrimage.

They ordered pilgrims coming from outside Makkah to circumambulate Al-Ka'bah in Quraysh uniform clothes, but if they could not afford them, men were to do so in a state of nudity, and

women with only some piece of cloth to hide their groins. Allâh says in this concern:

"O Children of Adam! Take your adornment (by wearing your clean clothes), while praying [and going round (the Tawaf of) the Ka'bah]. (7:31)

If men or women were generous enough to go round Al-Ka'bah in their clothes, they had to discard them after circumambulation for good. (Bukhari 1/226; Ibn Hisham 1/202)

It was before [Hubal] that 'Abd-al-Muttalib shuffled the divination arrows [in order to find out which of his ten children he should sacrifice in fulfilment of a vow he had sworn], and the arrows pointed to his son 'Abdullah, the father of the Prophet. Muhammad's father's name was "Abdullah". Had there been no "Allah" in pre-Islamic Arab, there could be no Abdullah or slave of Allah in Arabia.

When 'Abd al-Mutallib is described as having prayed to Allah while consulting Hubal's arrow, it is simply that the sources balk at depicting the Prophet's grandfather as a genuine pagan, not that Allah and Hubal were alternative names of the same god<sup>11</sup>

Among their idols, the Quraysh also had Isif and Na'ilah. On being transformed into petrified form, they were placed by the Ka'bah in order that people might see them and be warned. Finally, as their origin became remote and, therefore, forgotten, and idol worship came into vogue, they were worshipped with the other idols. One of them stood close to the Ka'bah while the other was placed by Zamzam. Later, the Quraysh moved the one which stood close to the Ka'bah to the side of the other by Zamzam where they sacrificed to both.

Said [abu-al-Mundhir: The Quraysh] had another idol [called] Manaf. They were wont to call their children 'Abd-Manaf, after it. The menstruating women were not allowed to come near the idols or to touch them.

## **Dhu-al-Khalasah**

Among those idols, too, was dhu-al-Khalasah. It was a carved niece of white quartz with something in the form of a crown upon its head. It stood in Tahalah, between Mecca and San'a, at a distance of seven nights' journey from Mecca. Its custody was in the hands of the banu-Umamah of the Bahilah ihn-A'sur. The Khath'am, the Bajilah, and the Azd of al-Sarah, as well as those Arab sub-tribes of the Hawazin who lived in their vicinity and those Arabs residing in Tabalah, were wont to venerate it and come to it with sacrifice.

A certain man said:

*"O dhu-al-Khalasah, wert the one wronged,  
Thy father the one murdered and buried,  
Thou wouldst not have forbidden  
the killing of the enemy."*

This he said when his father was murdered, and he sought to avenge him. He, therefore, went to dhu-al-Khalasah and shuffled the divination arrows, but they resulted in a negative message forbidding him to seek revenge. Thereupon he said those verses. Some people, however, ascribe the incident to Imru'-al Qays ibn-Hujr al-Kindi.

Khidash ibn-Zuhayr al-'Amiri refers to dhu-al-Khalasah in verses which he addressed to 'Ath'ath ibn-Wahshi al-Khatli'ami concerning a covenant contracted between them but violated by the latter.

He said:

*"I reminded him of the covenant that existed between us twain,  
And of the age-long friendship which both of us shared;  
That our witness was God and the White Quartz Idol of Tabalah,  
And the oath of al-Nu'man when he embraced the faith of Christ."*

When the Apostle of God captured Mecca and the Arabs embraced Islam, among the delegates who came to pay their homage was Jarir ibn-'Abdullah[16]. He came to the Apostle and embraced Islam before him. Thereupon the Apostle addressed him saying, "O Jarir! Wilt thou not rid me of dhu-al-Khalasah?" Jarir replied, "Yea." So



the Apostle dispatched him to destroy it. He set out until he got to the banu-Abmas[17] of the Bajilah [tribe] and with them he proceeded to dhu-al-Khalasah. There he was met by the Khath'am and the Bahilah, who resisted him and attempted to defend dhu-al-Khalasah. He, therefore, fought them and killed a hundred men of the Bahilah, its custodians, and many of the Khath'am[15]; while of the banu-Qubafah ibn-'Amir ibn-Khath'am[18] he killed two hundred. having defeated them and forced them into flight, he demolished the building which stood over dhu-al-Khalasah and set it on fire. A certain woman of the banu-Khath'am thereupon said:

*"The banu-Umamah, each wielding his spear,  
Were slaughtered at al-Wahyab, their abode;  
They came to defend their shrine, only to find  
Lions with brandished swords clamoring for blood.  
The women of the Khath'am were, then, humiliated  
By the men of the Abmas, and abased."*

At the present time dhu-al-Khalassah constitutes the threshold of the gate of the mosque at Tabalab.

We have been told that the Apostle of God once said, "This world shall not pass away until the buttocks of the women of Daws[20] wiggle [again] around dhu-al-Khalasah and they worship it as they were wont to do [before Islam][21]."

Narrated Qais: Jarir said "Allah's Apostle said to me. "Won't you relieve me from Dhul-Khalasa?" I replied. "Yes. (I will relieve you)." So I proceeded along with one-hundred and fifty cavalry from Ahmas tribe who were skillful in riding horses. I used not to sit firm over horses. so I informed the Prophet of that. and he stroke my chest with his hand till I saw the marks of his hand over my chest and he said. O Allah! Make him firm and one who guides others and is guided (on the right path).' Since then I have never fallen from a horse. Dhul-I—Khulasa was a house in Yemen belonging to the tribe of Khatham and Bajaila. and in it there were idols which were worshipped. and it was called Al-Ka'ba." Jarir went there. burnt it with fire and dismantled it. When Jarir reached Yemen. there was a man who used to foretell and give good omens by casting arrows of

divination. Someone said to him. "The messenger of Allah's Apostle is present here and if he should get hold of you. he would chop off your neck." One day while he was using them (i.e. arrows of divination). Jarir stopped there and said to him. "Break them (i.e. the arrows) and testify that None has the right to be worshipped except Allah. or else I will chop off your neck." So the man broke those arrows and testified that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah. Then Jarir sent a man called Abu Artata from the tribe of Ahmas to the Prophet to convey the good news (of destroying Dhu-l-Khalasa). So when the messenger reached the Prophet. he said. "O Allah's Apostle! By Him Who sent you with the Truth. I did not leave it till it was like a scabby camel." Then the Prophet blessed the horses of Ahmas and their men five times. Volume 5. Book 59. Number 643

### *The Religion and Society of Abraham*

The religion of Abraham belongs to the mythological period before the Mosaic concept of the abstract God acting in history had come about. All the references to Abraham's God are in the form of El, such as El Shaddai, God of the Mountain sometimes also referred to as the Almighty in the heavens suggesting an astral deity, and the rituals such as dividing the animal sacrifice are of an older kind, consistent with El and the older semitic deities rather than revealed monotheism. There is thus no valid substance to the claim that the monotheism of Abraham preceded the polythesitic deities of pre-Islamic Arab society or that the Ka'aba was founded by Abraham as the house of the one God.

Abraham is said in the Bible to have made a journey from Ur of the Chaldees to Harran. These were the Southern and Northern centers of worship of the ancient Moon God, Nannar or Sin. When Woolley<sup>12, 13</sup> excavated the Royal Tombs at Ur, he was surprised to find a 'ram in a thicket' echoing Abraham's sacrificial offer of Isaac and the 'scapegoat'. Many of Abraham's relatives and ancestors lived in the vicinity of Harran. Several key names in Abraham's family, Terah (compare Yerah Moon God of Canaan), Laban, Sarah and Milcah are all derived from worship of the Moon Deity<sup>14</sup> The deification of Ab-ram in the earliest documents is a synonym for Ab-

Sin (Briffault R76v3:108).

Benjaminites were nomads on the outskirts of Mari around 1760 BC who had specific associations with Harran<sup>15,16</sup>. The names Abi-ram (Abraham) Yasmah-El (Ishmael) Yaqob-El (Jacob), a name also shared by a Hyksos chief and El-Laban (Laban) all appear at Mari. The root mlk denoting melech king or in its sacrificial form Moloch is also found. Another word at Mari in this time which will come to have significance in Islam is umma or "mother unit" of the nomadic tribes<sup>17,18</sup>.

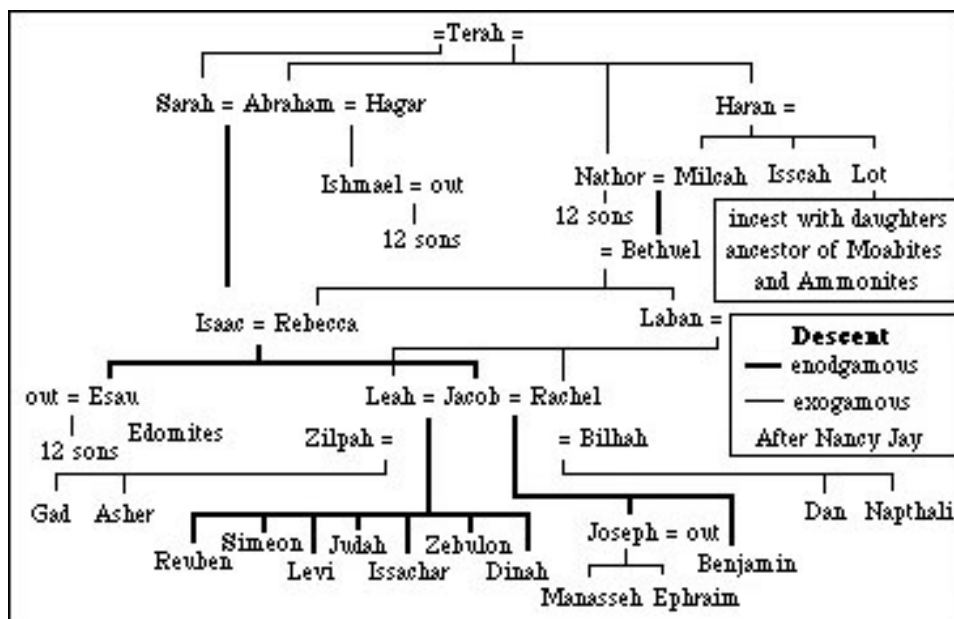
Jacob's fourfold blessing is also of 'the deep' and 'the breasts and womb', hinting at the ancient 'mother' as well as the 'father' god and El Shaddai of the mountains and heavens:

*Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee;  
and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven  
above,  
blessings of the deep that lieth under,  
blessings of the breasts, and of the womb (Gen 49:25 )*

Associated with this cultural complex is an older form of marriage called the beena marriage, associated with the matriarchs at the founding of Old Testament myth. The episodes concerning Laban in Genesis, hint at a matrilineal society in which partners are subject to the wife's family and are expected to do service in dwelling with them for years at a time. The seven years Jacob spent with Laban for each wife indicates the line of Laban was matrilineal and matrilineal in a way which gave power to the brothers of the mother. Moving to the family of the wife is consistent with the injunction in Genesis to "leave your father and mother and cleave unto your wife" and with Jewish marriage practice to go into the wife's tent. In such a society child-support is achieved at least partly by immediate relatives of the mother, in which uncles figure prominently thus compensating for their lack of their own paternity uncertainty by a commensurate investment in their sisters' children with whom they share a significant genetic bond.

Arameans are any people belonging to a confederacy of tribes that

migrated from the Arabian Peninsula to the Fertile Crescent in the 2nd millennium BC. The Britannica notes that among them were the biblical matriarchs Leah and Rachel, wives of Jacob. They formed principalities around and including Damascus. Aramaic language and culture spread through international trade, reaching a cultural peak during the 9th–8th centuries BC. Aramaic became the universal language of commerce, culture, and government throughout the fertile crescent and remained so to the time of Yeshua and in some places to the 7th century. Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and Akkadian all have a common origin in Afro-Asiatic. Aramaic script emerged in turn from Phoenician and old Canaanite phonetic.



Family tree of the tribes of Israel illustrates a careful attempt to resolve dissonance between matrilineal and patrilineal paradigms, involving cousin or even half-sister marriage. Names like Terah and Laban are associated with the moon god, who presided at both Ur and Harran, the two towns spanning Abraham's migration (Briffault). Abraham takes both a wife Sarah who gives birth to Isaac, and a slave concubine, Hagar who is sent away with Ishmael. Jacob is also polygynous with two wives and a slave concubine of each given to them by Laban with whom he also sires children in their mistresses stead.

Nancy Jay in "Throughout Your Generations Forever"<sup>19</sup>, draws attention to the schism between such societies probably originating in Canaanite planter cultures and the patriarchal traditions of shepherding tribes illustrated in Jacob's departure and many successive biblical invocations against the Queen of Heaven and her

ways. The division between these two cultures cuts directly through the Gordian knot of paternity uncertainty discussed earlier. Despite the characterization of the Jews as archetypally patriarchal, the era of the patriarchs is noted for its strong independent women. The prominence and independence of Sarah 'the queen' as well as Rebecca, Rachel and Leah is notable. Briffault (v1 372) comments: "the Jewish rabbis themselves, at a comparatively late date acknowledged that the four matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah had occupied a more important position than the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. According to Robinson Smith<sup>20</sup> the tribe of Levi was originally metronymous (matrilineal), being the tribe of Leah." This matrilineal element still persists in Jewish descent coming through the mother, reflected in Genesis 2:24:

*'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother,  
and shall cleave unto his wife.'*

It was the matriarch Rebecca who ordered Jacob to trick Isaac with a fleece, to steal hairy Esau's blessing as firstborn: "Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them." She did so because Esau had 'married out', taking two Hittite wives, Judith and Bashemath. It is Rebecca who sends Jacob to Laban: "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran." The moment he arrives, a cousin marriage is arranged with Rachel. Having served seven years with the matrilineal kin for the love of Rachel, Laban tricks Jacob into also marrying Leah, because the first-born daughter should proceed the younger in marriage, causing him to tarry another 'week' of seven years. In an ironic tilt at the matriarchy, when Jacob escapes Laban's clutches as mother's brother, to return as he promised to his father's line, it is Rachel who hides under her menstrual skirts Laban's stolen teraphim, suggested to be tokens of land and lineage - "Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?" In Nuzi documents, possession of the 'house gods' are considered title to estate<sup>21</sup>. The entire myth of mutual deceit indicates a transfer from matriliney to patriliney in the name of El:

*And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt*

*spread abroad  
to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south:  
and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be  
blessed (Gen 28:13).*

*And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward  
heaven, and tell the stars,  
if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy  
seed be (Gen 15:5).*

Jacob had made his pact with El at Bethel when he erected a standing stone he had slept over, just as the Arabians used three stones for a pot stand and the fourth for God, both rituals uniting Earth and Heaven. Thus too the Ka'aba, as God's house, stands as a baetyl in the Arabic bedouin tradition. Moreover, the name Luz which means a 'place of refuge' became the central sanctuary for the amphictiony of the twelve tribes of Israel<sup>22</sup>. Notice also that Jacob's belief in this God is conditional on the deities performance in real life, just as the polytheists of Arabia worshipped the deities for the karmic efficacy:

*And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee (Gen 28:18).*

Jay makes a penetrating analysis of the transition between matrilineal and patrilineal lines of descent, in which sacrifice, or forgone sacrifice, and the paternal blessing were a way of recognizing the more ephemeral male line of descent through the father to the blessed son. The theme of the 'barren' woman in Sarah and Rachel is likewise significant, both in terms of close relative infertility, and the female line of descent it implies. "Israelite

tradition did not deny descent from women and consequently faced the dilemma: How is a pure and eternal patriline to be maintained if descent from women is not denied? Endogamy appears to be a solution; marriage to a woman of the same patrilineage ensures the offsprings' patrilineage membership, even if it is figured through the mother. Close agnatic endogamy (marriage within the patriline) is extremely rare, except in Semitic traditions. In a way reminiscent of the Patriarchs, throughout the Arab world, families have preferred men to marry their father's brother's daughters. The descent line of the Patriarchs continued only through endogamy: Isaac and Jacob (but not Ishmael) married endogamously in cousin marriages. Joseph married exogamously but his sons were adopted by Jacob, correcting this, and other, irregularities of their descent".

"The 'Elohists' account states that Sarah was a half sister of Abraham, having the same father but a different mother. Such a marriage would be impossible in any regular patrilineal descent system. Unless we reject E's account (thereby making the Patriarchs liars) we must see here a recognition of descent from women so pronounced as to be almost matrilineal, for if Abraham and Sarah had the same father but different mothers, it is only as their mothers' offspring that their marriage was not incestuous ... In Hurrian society the bonds of marriage were strongest and most solemn when the wife had simultaneously the juridical status of a sister, regardless of actual blood ties... The practice was apparently a reflection of the underlying fraternal system, and it gave the adoptive brother greater authority than was granted the husband ... The patriarchal narratives tell the story of the resolution of this descent conflict, a resolution in which sacrifice plays a crucial role".

Centrally Abraham's covenant with God is sexually reproductive:

*And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly...  
And I will make thee exceeding fruitful,  
and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. ...*

It involves circumcision of the penis as a sacrificial token of male fertility:

*This is my covenant, which ye shall keep,  
between me and you and thy seed after thee;  
Every man child among you shall be circumcised.  
And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin;  
and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.*



Idol with bull's head and phallus - Palestine<sup>23</sup>, Timna  
Phallic teraphim and 'Nehustan' brazen serpent from Midianite  
period.<sup>24</sup>

Testifying was likewise, for Abraham, swearing by the testis (L. testis testicle, witness) and hence the entire Old and New Testaments:

*"And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, ... Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: And I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. (Gen 24:2).*

Malamat<sup>25</sup> comments that the unusual genealogy of Nahor in Gen 22:20-24 suggests that Abraham was originally one of the wandering sons traditionally listed as children of concubines (Ishmael etc.) in the Old Testament as opposed to the blessed sons (Isaac, Jacob). The children of Israel are the wanderers from Aram-



Naharaim on the upper Harbur. Such pastoral migrations were noted at Mari.

## *El and the Deities of Canaan*

Central to the Semitic notion of deity is El, the old fatherly creator god and his consort, Athirat or Asherah. "Both were primordial beings, they had been there always." El, whose name simply meant 'god' was the creator and procreator, overseer of conception, who sired the gods, thus being also called 'Bull El' in continuity with the ancient bull god of fertility. Asherah and El thus form a creation hieros-gamos of male and female, representing the bull and the earth goddess we see emerging from the ancient continuum at Catal Huyuk. El is supposed to have gone out to sea and asked two Goddesses, one presumably being Athirat and the other possibly Anath to choose between being his spouses and being his daughters. They chose the former. Their offspring are Shaher and Shalem, the morning and evening stars, from which Lucifer, the light-bearer, takes his name.

Many of the archetypes we now perceive in Yahweh have their origin in El. He is an original creator god - the 'Creator of Created things', which definitely includes fertility, but may also include the creation of Heaven and Earth as with the Mesopotamian Marduk and Tiamat, whose own mythology may be partly derived from the older Canaanite myths. El was the proverbial old man who is both a father and judge. He was a kindly and kindly figure, benevolent but not uninvolved. He was the god of decrees and the father of the reigning king. "It was his responsibility to ensure that equilibrium was preserved among all the conflicting and competing powers within it." He thus was respected by the other Gods - "Your decree El is wise, your wisdom is everlasting." "It was not for nothing that El was called 'the kindly and compassionate' - a design strangely reminiscent of 'Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate' in Islam. Not that El was incapable of anger: transgressions in the community ... could provoke him - and then he would prompt neighbouring powers to invade and conquer. To avert such calamities the king had to perform rites of expiation and offer sacrifices" (Cohn 1993 119).



Asherah (Gray)

Asherah, the Semitic name of the Great Goddess, whose origin differs from Astarte, was "in wisdom the Mistress of the Gods", called by the Sumerians Ashnan "the strength of all things", a "kindly and beautiful maiden." The Canaanites called her "She who gives birth to the Gods" and as the "Lady who traverses the Sea" she is Goddess of both the Sea and Moon. In the Old Testament she is identified with her sacred groves.

Although Canaanite mythology varies from city to city, the discovery of extensive records at Ras Shamra of the city of Ugarit, gives us a uniquely detailed view of Canaanite Gods and Goddesses, dating from the author Elimelek around 1370 BC. Kings traditionally ruled as intermediaries of the Gods in maintaining the fertility of the land.

Despite siring the Gods and Goddesses, El and Asherah, no longer remain the only key players in the cosmic drama. As with Sumerian and many other mythologies a cosmic struggle for supremacy arises in which mortal combat occurs. This weaves themes both of maintaining the cosmic order against the turbulent waters of chaos and the barren season of death and of combat associated with new deities arising from social and political change.

In the Canaanite myth, a new and possibly Akkadian outsider, whose name is Ba'al Haddad or Lord enters the situation in hated

competition with Asherah and her children by El. He is a young, warlike god of wind and thunderstorms and thus fertility itself. Unlike El, he is not judicious, frequently figuring in situations from which he must be saved. In this respect he displays a significant parallel to Dumuzi (Tammuz) among the Mesopotamians, which will prove to be of significance. He also has the hideous attribute of devouring his own children, consistent with infanticide practices of several semitic patron gods.

Initially Ba'al and Anat are members of El's court. Ba'al attacks El by surprise and castrates him, assuming the power of his fertility. In effect, Ba'al becomes the central intermediary of paternal cosmic order ... "it is Ba'al's responsibility to ensure El's benevolent intention is realized", but he does not replace the primal creative power of El.

El, who loves all the Gods, now calls on his children as chaos gods to avenge his displacement. His son Yamm, Lord of the Sea and the mythical ocean of chaos lying beyond the ordered world, terrorizes the gods into giving up Baal. But Ba'al refuses and conquers Yamm, Ba'al now emerging as the God who overcomes the waters of chaos.

Mot, the next offspring, who is Lord of the Underworld and the barren season then defeats Ba'al, enraging Ba'al's consort Anath, who ironically in the Ugarit form of the myth enters the fray as a Death Goddess upholding the paternal order. When Mot refuses to revive Ba'al, Anath kills and dismembers him, scattering his remains over the land. Baal, now revived, undertakes a full-scale war against all the other gods, who are now referred to as the "Sons of Asherah," and is victorious. The death of Mot is conceived in a seven year cycle as representing the end of seven years of drought and famine.

In her role of Goddess of War and Death , Anath's lust for blood is unbounded: "Anat kills the people living in valleys, in cities and on the seashore and in the land of sunrise, until the cut off heads of soldiers were reaching to her belt and she was wading up to her waist in blood. Violently she smites and gloats, Anat cuts them down and gazes; her liver exhaults in mirth ... for she plunges her knees in the blood of soldiers, her loins in the gore of warriors, till

she has had her fill of slaughtering in the house, of cleaving among the tables." After which, she, the Progenetress of Nations washed her hands of the blood of the slain, in dew and rain supplied by her brother Ba'al." (Walker 29, Cohn 1993 126)

"Anath was fertilized by the blood of men, rather than semen, because her worship dated all the way back to the neolithic, when fatherhood was unknown and blood was considered the only substance which could transmit life. Hecatombs of [100] men seem to have been sacrificed to Anath when her image was reddened with rouge and henna for the occasion. Like the Lady of the Serpent Skirt, Anath hung the shorn penises of her victims on her goatskin apron or aegis." "Anath's capacity to curse and kill made even the Heavenly Father afraid of her. When El seemed reluctant to do her bidding, she threatened to smash his head and cover his grey hair and beard with gore. He hastily gave her everything she asked, saying 'Whoever hinders thee will be crushed' " (Walker 30).

In the mythical cycle, "Mot too is [now] revived and once again challenges Baal to single combat. In the midst of the fighting, however, the sun-goddess, Spsi (Shapash), intervenes, advising Mot that no further combat is needed because El is now on the side of Baal. El, always patriarchal and judicious, has discerned that Baal in his defeat and resurrection has manifested a new form of order; as a patriarchal deity El must uphold this new order. The decree is made that Baal will rule during the seasons of fertility and Mot during the seasons of sterility and drought." - Grollier

There are many implications of this mythical cycle that underly the events of the Bible and overshadow and cast the die for the Christian heritage (Grollier Multimedia Encyclopedia 1993):

\* Firstly: "the myth forms a watershed for the understanding of myth and history throughout the Near East. "Egyptian, Hittite, Hurrian, and Ugaritic myths are present in this cycle. Moreover, Hesiod clearly made use of some of these mythological elements in his Theogony; Baal, Yamm, and Mot are directly related to Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades."

\* Secondly: "although the Old Testament contains a polemic against Baal, Asherah, and Astarte, some of the elements and practices of

the Hebrews are best understood within the context of Canaanite mythology."

\* Thirdly: Anath as the death twin of Mari Lady of Birth, and the destroyer of the dying and reviving Mot plays a central, if concealed role in the crucifixion psychodrama.

"Anath annually cast her death-curse anathema on the Canaanite god", fulfilling Mot's slaying of Ba'al and his destruction in turn by her. Mot stood for the barren season that slew its own fertile twin Aleyin, the son of Ba'al. "In typical sacred-king style Mot-Aleyin was the son of the virgin Anath and also the bridegroom of his own mother. Like Jesus the Lamb of God, Aleyin said 'I am the lamb which is made ready with pure wheat to be sacrificed in expiation.' " (Walker 31 [Larousse]).

"After Aleyin's death, Anath resurrects him and sacrifices Mot, telling him he has been forsaken by his heavenly father El." This is precisely the same father to whom Jesus cried " 'Eloi Eloi lama sabaschthani' - El El why hast thou forsaken me? ... and some said 'Behold he calleth for Elias' and one ran and filled a sponge with vinegar and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink saying, 'Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down'. And Jesus cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost." (Walker 31, Mark 15:34

"The sacred drama included a moment when Anath broke Mot's reed scepter, to signify his castration, again foreshadowing a detail of the Christian Gospels. ... Naturally the god-killing Anath was much diabolized in patriarchal legends. Abyssinian Christians called her Aynat "the evil eye of earth". They said she was an old witch destroyed by Jesus, who commanded that she must be burned and her ashes scattered on the wind." (Walker 31)

St. Paul's excommunication curse "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha derives from the more ancient curse of Anath:

Ana-tithenai: to set up, dedicate [a curse], maranatha: Our Lord [bridegroom], come.

Another pertinent deity, because of his relationship to Sin, or Nannar, the God of Abraham is Yarikh the moon god. 'The illuminator of myriads (of stars)', 'lamp of heaven', possibly also the crescent moon and 'lord of the sicle' and thereby the father of the Kotharat. He is patron of the city Qart-Abilim. Like Sin, he is a dedicated courtier. After sunset he embraces Nikkal-and-Ib (Ningal) and becomes determined to marry her. He refuses the daughters of Baal and presents a lavish brideprice to Nikkal-and-Ib's family and the two are wed. Baal-Hadad's creatures devour his handmaidens, so he sends them to El. El tells them to go into the wilderness and there birth horned buffalo, which will distract Baal-Hadad.

Nikkal-and-Ib 'great lady and clear/bright/fruit' or 'Great goddess of fruit'. She is possibly the daughter of Dagon of Tuttul, or else of Khirkihib. She is romanced by Yarikh and marries him after Yarikh arranges a brideprice with Khirkihib and pays it to her parents.

Kotharat (was thought to be Kathirat) 'skillful'. They are a group of goddesses associated with conception and childbirth. '...The swallow-like daughters of the crescent moon.' They are also associated with the new moon. They attend Daniel for seven days to aid in the conception of Aqhat and receive his sacrifice.

### *Jewish and Christian influences*

From the 4th century AD, Christian bishops made notable conversions of the Kings of Himyar, Aksum and of Ethiopia generally. Narjan, an ancient pagan pilgrimage spot in a fertile valley on the trade route became a Christian stronghold. Medina became a centre of Jewish influence. Christianity and Judaism entered into competition in Arabia, encouraged by the Persians. In 522, King Dhu Nawas Yusaf "Lord of Curls" became the last elected Himyar king, descendent of a Jewish hero, who made war on the Christians. He offered the citizens of Naryan the choice of Jewry or death. When they refused he burned them all in a great trench. Afterwards Narjan as named "the trench". In response the Ethiopians overcame them and Abraha made San'a a Christian pilgrimage point which rivalled Mecca. This led to an expeditionary force of Christians to try to destroy the Ka'aba. In turn Persia invaded and for a short time the country became a Persian satrapy.

This confused situation laid the seeds for the emergence of Islam.

Muhammad left Mecca under a cloud, because the Meccans remained faithful to al-Uzza and their iconic deities and rejected his exclusive monotheism which branded their deities false icons, but his brand of Abrahamic monotheism struck a stronger chord in Medina, and although he was derided by the Jews there for his religion, and turned from bowing to Jerusalem to Mecca as the nexus of God's dwelling, even in spite of the genocide of the Jewish men after the siege of Medina, it was the greater attraction of monotheism in the environment of Medina which made the growth of Islam possible. Patricia Crone (1987) has pointed out that Muhammad, in combining the monotheism which had already found a natural ground swell in Medina with a strong strategic emphasis on tribal law guaranteed the sweeping popularity of the religion. This however means that large sections of the Quran and Sharia are simply recitations of tribal law of the 6th-9th century AD and not the revealed word of al-Lah. Moreover recent finds of old Quranic writings in Yemen<sup>26</sup>, see also<sup>27</sup>, or<sup>28</sup> with overlaid redactions confirm that like the Bible, the Quran is a collection of anecdotal sayings later compiled into a canonical version and not a text revealed in one clear rendition by God. [Gerd Puin](#) who has researched these, comments:

"My idea is that the Koran is a kind of cocktail of texts that were not all understood even at the time of Muhammad. Many of them may even be a hundred years older than Islam itself. Even within the Islamic traditions there is a huge body of contradictory information, including a significant Christian substrate; one can derive a whole Islamic anti-history from them if one wants. The Qur'an claims for itself that it is 'mubeen,' or clear, but if you look at it, you will notice that every fifth sentence or so simply doesn't make sense. Many Muslims will tell you otherwise, of course, but the fact is that a fifth of the Qur'anic text is just incomprehensible. This is what has caused the traditional anxiety regarding translation. If the Qur'an is not comprehensible, if it can't even be understood in Arabic, then it's not translatable into any language. That is why Muslims are afraid. Since the Qur'an claims repeatedly to be clear but is not—there is an obvious and serious contradiction. Something else must

be going on.”

Here are follow some Islamic commentaries on this phase:

The migration of the Jews from Palestine to Arabia passed through two phases: first, as a result of the pressure to which they were exposed, the destruction of their temple, and taking most of them as captives to Babylon, at the hand of the King Bukhtanassar. In the year B.C. 587 some Jews left Palestine for Hijaz and settled in the northern areas whereof. The second phase started with the Roman occupation of Palestine under the leadership of Roman Buts in 70 A.D. This resulted in a tidal wave of Jewish migration into Hijaz, and Yathrib, Khaibar and Taima', in particular. Here, they made proselytes of several tribes, built forts and castles, and lived in villages. Judaism managed to play an important role in the pre-Islam political life. When Islam dawned on that land, there had already been several famous Jewish tribes — Khabeer, Al-Mustaliq, An-Nadeer, Quraizah and Qainuqa`. In some versions, the Jewish tribes counted as many as twenty. [Qalb Jazeerat Al-Arab, p.151]

Judaism was introduced into Yemen by someone called As'ad Abi Karb. He had gone to fight in Yathrib and there he embraced Judaism and then went back taking with him two rabbis from Bani Quraizah to instruct the people of Yemen in this new religion. Judaism found a fertile soil there to propagate and gain adherents. After his death, his son Yusuf Dhu Nawas rose to power, attacked the Christian community in Najran and ordered them to embrace Judaism. When they refused, he ordered that a pit of fire be dug and all the Christians indiscriminately be dropped to burn therein. Estimates say that between 20-40 thousand Christians were killed in that human massacre. The Qur'ân related part of that story in Al-Buruj (zodiacal signs) Chapter. [Tafheem-ul-Qur'an 6/297; Ibn Hisham 1/20-36]

Christianity had first made its appearance in Arabia following the entry of the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) and Roman colonists into that country. The Abyssinian (Ethiopian) colonization forces in league with Christian missions entered Yemen as a retaliatory reaction for the iniquities of Dhu Nawas, and started vehemently to propagate their faith ardently. They even built a church and called it Yemeni



Al-Ka'bah with the aim of directing the Arab pilgrimage caravans towards Yemen, and then made an attempt to demolish the Sacred House in Makkah. Allâh, the Almighty, however did punish them and made an example of them – here and hereafter. [Tafheem-ul-Qur'an 6/297; Ibn Hisham 1/20-36]

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