

Abraham in Islamic Perspective Reflections on the Development of Monotheism in Pre-Islamic Arabia

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Islamic religious tradition places Abraham at the center of the monotheistic ideal constituting the core of Islam. Among the indications of the centrality of Abraham in Islam already from its earliest times is the fact that his name appears 69 times in 25 Sūras of the Qur'ān.¹ In this paper I shall attempt to depict the character of Abraham as reflected in the Islamic tradition, and I will discuss the development of religious belief among the Arabs until their adoption of Islam. Ultimately, I shall pose the question of what the Abraham tradition of Islamic times can tell us about how he was viewed among the Arabs prior to the time of the Prophet.

The question of the affinity between Islam and the monotheism of Abraham has occupied scholars of Islam from the late 1800s and throughout the twentieth century, and has been dominated by two mutually opposing perspectives. The first school of thought centers on a hypothesis proposed by the Dutch Orientalist C. SNOUCK HURGRONJE and subsequently expanded and given additional support by his student A. J. WENSINCK. Both of these scholars emphasized that Abraham was not a central focus of Muḥammad's early preaching. In his 1880 Ph. D. dissertation SNOUCK argued that major attention was paid to Abraham only after Muḥammad migrated to Medina, and not before the outbreak of the dispute between himself and the local Jewish community. According to this point of view, it was only after he reached the conclusion that he could no longer rely on the support of the Jews that he began to seek another mainstay. Only then did Muḥammad's view reach the turning point reflected in

¹) Muḥammad Fu'ād 'ABD AL-BĀQĪ, *Al-Mu'jam al-mufharas li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Cairo, 1364/1945), 1b–2b.

the declaration that Abraham was the first Muslim, *awwal al-muslimīn*, and that the Arabs are the descendants of his son Ishmael. According to this belief Ishmael, together with his father, established the Ka'ba, the house of God, so that it would serve as the center of divine worship and attract believers as a site of pilgrimage. In this manner Abraham was presented as the forerunner of Muḥammad, the prophet of the Arabs, and on this basis Islam could claim to be the embodiment of a pure monotheism preached by Abraham. This, in turn, allowed Muḥammad to claim priority for Islam over Judaism and Christianity.²

This theory of course was – and remains – entirely unacceptable from an Islamic point of view. The stories about Abraham in the Qur'ān form part of God's word, and as such they must be true; that there could be some "legend" of Abraham involved here is a priori impossible. The sensitivity of the question was demonstrated by the reaction of certain Muslims to the views of WENSINCK on the matter. The Dutch Orientalist was awarded a membership in the Royal Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo by King Fu'ād himself in 1933; but by then the Arabic translation of the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* was beginning to appear, and this revealed WENSINCK's views about the legendary character of the Qur'ānic materials about Abraham. Agitation was launched against

²) The hypothesis of SNOUCK HURGRONJE is argued at length in his *Het mekkaansche Feest* (Leiden, 1880); ed. and trans. Lawrence I. CONRAD and Petra SIJPESTEIJN, *The Meccan Pilgrimage Festival: Its Emergence and Early Development* (Princeton, 2004). Cf. also the summaries in A. J. WENSINCK, art. "Ibrāhīm" in *EI*¹, II, 432a; Rudi PARET, art. "Ibrāhīm" in *EI*², III, 980a; and the comments of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Najjār on his entry in the Arabic translation of the first edition of the *EI*¹; *idem*: *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (Cairo, n.d.), 73–74; Dominique SOURDEL, *L'Islam médiéval* (Paris, 1979), 21. In another work, WENSINCK introduced the reason behind Muḥammad's adoption of the Abraham concept: he argued that the new orientation was designed to provide the Prophet with a new means to demonstrate the independence of the Islamic faith vis-à-vis Judaism and to present Islam from that time on as the originally revealed religion. Moreover, by adopting Abraham's religious heritage, he acquired the tools that later enabled him to emphasize the sanctity of Mecca as a first step in the reconciliation with the people of Mecca. See A. J. WENSINCK, *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*, ed. and trans. Wolfgang BEHN (Freiburg i. Br., 1975), 94–95; also Tor ANDRAE, *Mohammed: the Man and His Faith* (New York, 1960), 139; Ignaz GOLDZIEHER, *Introduction to Muslim Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth HAMORI (Princeton, 1981), 10; S. D. GOITEIN, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1964), 22.

WENSINCK by religious activists, and within a year his membership in the Academy had to be revoked.³

Our concerns here are of course historical ones, and on this basis it is also possible to see weaknesses in the arguments of SNOUCK and WENSINCK. The confessional polemic against this thesis is of no interest to us here, except to illustrate the broader sensitivities involved. More germane, of course, is the scientific aspect.

The weak point in SNOUCK's argument lies in the chronological order of the Sūras on which he based his conclusion. In fact, his argument is entirely refuted by the fact that Abraham was granted a special status earlier, in the Sūras of the Meccan period, long before Muḥammad emigrated to Medina and thus before the debate between him and the Jews of Medina arose. In other words, Abraham and his monotheistic faith were a focal point of Muḥammad's preaching since the earlier stages of his mission in Mecca. So the question of Abraham and his faith did not originate as a response to the hostile attitude of the Jews in Medina towards Muḥammad and his message.

SNOUCK's critique was also based on a series of Meccan verses wrongly attributed to the Medinan period. These verses indicate explicitly the close connection between Islam and Abraham, both on the genealogical level, since they name Abraham as the forefather of the people of Mecca, and on the dogmatic level, since they ascribe the establishment of the sanctuary of Mecca to Abraham. They also state that it was he who conceived the idea of monotheism, which was then brought to the Arabs by his son Ishmael.⁴

These verses constitute the starting point for those who adhere to the second school of thought and argue that the monotheistic impulse of Islam is independent from Judaism and Christianity. According to these scholars, Islam adopted the doctrine of monotheism that had been professed by Abraham before the establishment of either Judaism or Christianity. It was to this Abrahamic monotheism that Muḥammad referred, since he considered himself the sole heir of all prophets and messengers who professed that doctrine. In this sense, Muḥammad did not claim to be the preacher of a new religion, but a reformer who believed he was reviving the original pure monotheism professed by Abra-

³) For the details about this controversy I am grateful to Professor Lawrence CONRAD, who has advised me of the relevant materials in the archives of the Leiden University Library.

⁴) PARET, "Ibrāhīm", 980b.

ham.⁵ In the eyes of the Arabs of his generation, Muḥammad's monotheism was different from that of Judaism and Christianity,⁶ though the actual ideas of Abrahamic monotheism were not alien to the pre-Islamic religious vision that prevailed among the Arabs in the northern part of the Peninsula.⁷ Even Arab tribes from outside the territorial limits of the Ḥijāz, especially those who lived in the territory of Job (Ayyūb) on the southeastern shore of the Dead Sea, were said to have been monotheists.⁸ The rite of pilgrimage to the sanctuary at Mecca was a prominent attestation of Abrahamic monotheism in its pre-Islamic Arab form.⁹

The very term "Islam", which was given to the monotheistic religion heralded by Muḥammad, was also given as the name of the Abrahamic monotheistic religion in ancient Syria. The so-called *ṣuḥuf Ibrāhīm*, the scrolls ascribed to Abraham, mentioned in the Qur'ān, were said to have been written in the Syriac language. This term and its religious significance were not previously known in the Arabic language. According to Sūrat al-Ḥajj (22), v. 78, it was Abraham who referred to his religion as "Islam" and its adherents as *muslimūn*.¹⁰ The term "Allāh" as the name of the supreme God was part of the religious heritage of the Semitic people.¹¹ The various formulae of *talbiya*, or ritual invocation, of the pre-Islamic tribes reflect the Arabs' concept of the supreme God, as distin-

⁵) H. A. R. GIBB, *Mohammedanism: an Historical Survey*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1969), 31–32; F. E. PETERS, *Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* (Princeton, 1982), 197; ANDRAE, *Mohammed*, 110; SOURDEL, *L'Islam médiéval*, 18, 24; W. Montgomery WATT, *What is Islam?*, 2nd ed. (London, 1969), 86–87.

⁶) al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, I, ed. Muḥammad ḤAMĪD ALLĀH (Cairo, 1959), 11.

⁷) M. J. KISTER, "Labbayka allāhuma labbayka: On a Monotheistic Aspect of a Jāhiliyya Practice", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), 33–57.

⁸) J. Spencer TRIMMINGHAM, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, 1979) 249.

⁹) GIBB, *Mohammedanism*, 32; Andrew RIPPIN, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London, 1994), I, 13.

¹⁰) Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-zīna*, ed. Ḥusayn ibn Fayḍ Allāh AL-ḤAMDĀNĪ (Cairo, 1958), 141; Charles Culter TORREY, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York, 1932), 101–102. On the secular concept of "Islam" as stemming from an Arabic root, see M. M. BRAVMANN, *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam* (Leiden, 1972), 24; see also D. Z. H. BANETH, "What did Muḥammad Mean When He Called his Religion 'Islam'? : the Original Meaning of *aslama* and its Derivatives", *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971), 183–90.

¹¹) TRIMMINGHAM, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 248.

guished from lesser deities.¹² The tribes' awareness of the supreme God, Allāh, did not make them unequivocally monotheistic; nor did their belief in local or tribal deities make them essentially polytheistic. They were rather *mushrikūn*, people who believed in the supreme God while at the same time believing in deities whom they perceived as junior partners to this supreme God.¹³ The religious terminology is also reflected in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. The concept of "Allāh" appears in the poetry of Imru' al-Qays, who died about 150 years before Muḥammad's time. In some lines of poetry the poet swears by Allāh according to the formula of oaths adopted later by Islam.¹⁴ In another place the poet states that the fear of God, Allāh, is the main criterion for achieving perfection in life.¹⁵ Another verse speaks of praising God in gratitude for the poet's fattened herd.¹⁶ The term *raḥmān* ("Compassionate One"), which is described as the God of earthly creatures (*rabb al-bariyya*), appears in these poems as a term synonymous with Allāh.¹⁷ In some pre-Islamic poetry the notion of Allāh was not always conceived in purely monotheistic terms, but rather reflects the polytheistic concept the Arabs had in mind. According to this notion Allah was overtly involved with the worship of other deities. In a pre-Islamic line of poetry Allāh together with two main deities in Arabia was included in an oath frequently used by the people of Mecca.¹⁸ The concept of Allāh preserved in the ancient Arabic heritage

¹²) KISTER, "Labbayka", 38.

¹³) *Ibid.*, 47-48; H. A. R. GIBB, "The Structure of Religious Thought in Islam", in his *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, ed. Stanford J. SHAW and William R. POLK (Boston, 1962), 187-88; W. Montgomery WATT, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford, 1953), 158.

¹⁴) Imru' al-Qays, *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl IBRĀHĪM, 3rd ed. (Cairo, 1969), 14, 31, 32, 43, 122, 134, 320, 335.

¹⁵) *Ibid.*, 336.

¹⁶) *Ibid.*, 347.

¹⁷) *Ibid.*, 462. Al-A'shā also mentions *al-raḥmān* in his *Dīwān*, ed. M. Naṣīr AL-DĪN (Beirut, 1987), 183.

¹⁸) KISTER, "Labbayka", xxxx. A line of verse attributed to Aws ibn Ḥajar reads as follows: *wa-bi'illāti wa-l-'uzzā wa-man dāna dīnahā, wa-bi'llāhi, inna allāha minhunna akbaru*. See Ibn al-Kalbī, *Kitāb al-aṣnām*, ed. Aāmad ZAKĪ (repr. Cairo, 1965), 17; Aws ibn Ḥajar, *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥammad Yūsuf NAJM, 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1967), 36. The mention of Allāh together with the main deities by the above-mentioned Jāhili poet refutes the conclusion reached by 'ALĪ in which he claims that wherever the term "Allāh" is mentioned in pre-Islamic poetry, it should be regarded as a substitution for the name of a deity. He argues that this substitution was made by Muslim narrators and poetry critics aimed at enhancing belief in God

was not a genuine Arab concept; rather its roots, as stated above, lie in late antiquity. Evidence for this may be found in a Saba'itic inscription from the fourth or fifth century CE.¹⁹ As a religious concept, it passed to the Arabs as part of the cultural-religious heritage expressed in Aramaic, which was the language of education and culture for Middle Eastern peoples before yielding its place to other Semitic languages, including Arabic.²⁰

The concept of Allāh in its religious-monotheistic sense was not a point of controversy between Muḥammad and his Arab contemporaries. They did not view Allāh as a foreign concept, but as an idea with which they had long been familiar. Indeed, the name of Allāh was often invoked by Arabs of that era, along with names of their local deities.²¹ The supernatural characteristics ascribed to Allāh that appear in the Qur'ān – such as the Creator of creatures, the Creator of heaven and earth, the one and only God, or the God of absolute justice – are more developed versions of pre-Islamic ideas and symbols already prevalent among the Arabs.²²

Islamic tradition unequivocally emphasized that the religious and ethical tradition of Abraham remained a consistent part of the Arab way of life, starting from the building of the Ka'ba, the house of God, by Abraham and his son Ishmael. This sanctuary was established according to divine command; it was not a result of Abraham's free choice. He was commanded by God to found the "house of God"; for this purpose God placed at his disposal the divine guidance (*sakīna*), which led him to Mecca, where he established the sanctuary.²³ The establishment of the

and diminishing the Arabs' ancient belief in polytheism. See Jawād 'ALĪ, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī ta'rīkh al-'arab qabla l-islām* (Baghdad, 1970), VI, 12.

¹⁹) al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-zīna*, II, 13–14; 'ALĪ, *Mufaṣṣal*, VI, 23–24; TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 251.

²⁰) Johann FUECK, "The Originality of the Arabian Prophet", in Merlin L. SWARTZ, ed., *Studies on Islam* (Oxford, 1981), 86–98.

²¹) GIBB, *Mohammedanism*, 26.

²²) GIBB, "The Structure of Religious Thought in Islam", 187–88.

²³) al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya* (Cairo, 1964), I, 251; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam*, ed. Muḥammad and Muṣṭafā A. 'ATĀ (Beirut, 1992), I, 269; Ibn Rusta, *al-'Alāq al-naḥṣa* (Beirut, 1988), 30; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl IBRĀHĪM (Cairo, 1960), I, 251–53; al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 3rd ed. (Beirut, 1969), I, 53; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī l-ta'rīkh*, 4th ed. (Beirut, 1983), I, 60–61; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 5th ed., (Beirut, 1981), I, 163–65. For the location of Abraham's house in Jerusalem according to Jewish tradition, see Uri RUBIN, "Ḥanīfiyya and Ka'ba", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), 85–112, especially 107–109. On the various definitions of *sakīna*, see al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, I, 251–52.

Ka'ba as the house of God was heralded by the archangel Gabriel, who announced to Hagar, after she and her infant son Ishmael were exiled there, that her son Ishmael would one day build it.²⁴ In order to avoid any textual discrepancies between the mountains of "Paran" mentioned in the Bible, where Hagar and her infant were sent, Muslim tradition states that Paran is none other than Mecca, or more specifically the mountainous area at whose center Mecca lies.²⁵ In accordance with this understanding the Ka'ba, as the house of God,²⁶ also bears other names: the house of Abraham²⁷ and the house of Ishmael.²⁸

Islamic tradition asserts that the establishment of the Ka'ba by Abraham and his son Ishmael had preceded the building of any other temple of worship on earth.²⁹ By establishing it Abraham sought to bequeath to his son Ishmael and his Arab descendants the religion in which he ushered in the original monotheism, which is designated by the Qur'ān as *millat Ibrāhīm*.³⁰ Against this background, the residents of Mecca were known as *ahl Allāh*, the "people of God", or the *ahl al-ḥurma*, the "people of the sanctuary".³¹ In other words, these were the people to whom it was considered that Abraham preached his religion. Not in vain did the people of Quraysh, the Prophet's own tribe, declare themselves the most eminent among the Arab nation. They acquired a special religious status by means of the institution called *al-tahammus*, which exempted them from some of the compulsory rituals performed by the rest of the Arab pilgrims, basing this privilege on the special relationship that linked them to Abraham.³²

²⁴) al-Nahrawālī, *al-I'lām bi-a'lām bayt Allāh al-ḥarām*, ed. Ferdinand WÜSTENFELD (Göttingen, 1857), 33–34.

²⁵) Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān* (Beirut, 1959), s. v. "Fārān"; al-Ḥamdānī, *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿarab*, ed. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī AL-AKWAʿ, 3rd ed. (Ṣaḥāʾ, 1983), 285.

²⁶) al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 90; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-munammaq*, ed. Khursīd Aḥmad FĀRIQ (Hyderabad, 1964), 10.

²⁷) Abū Maṣṣūr al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl IBRĀHĪM (Cairo, 1965), 16.

²⁸) *Ibid.*, 135.

²⁹) According to Muslim tradition, the temple of King Solomon (*haykal Sulaymān*) in Jerusalem was first erected by Jacob, the son of Isaac; Solomon later rebuilt it and renewed its walls. See al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, I, 250.

³⁰) Frants BUHL, art. "Milla", *EL*.

³¹) Ibn Ḥabīb, *Munammaq*, 10–11.

³²) M. J. KISTER, "Mecca and Tamim (Aspects of their Relations)", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 8 (1965), 113–63; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Munammaq*, 143.

The Islamic tradition, which ascribes to Abraham the establishment of the Ka'ba as a sanctuary, does not appear exceptional in light of the testimony of several verses in Genesis, which claims that Abraham established several holy places in different locations.³³ There is nothing particularly surprising in the possibility that some form of this could have been known in pre-Islamic Arabia.

The typical character ascribed to Abraham makes it easier for us to understand the Shī'ī tradition claiming that the mosque of al-Kūfa, which the adherents of this sect considered the most sacred location on earth, was established by Abraham, and that he was the first to pray there.³⁴ In other words, the mosque's importance and its religious sanctity were associated with its original foundation, and by the fact that this foundation was attributed to Abraham.

We are told that the doctrine of monotheism, one of whose most explicit symbols was the Ka'ba, never ceased to exist on the periphery of Mecca and within the territory inhabited by Ishmael's descendants. To corroborate this statement, Muslim scholars often refer to Sūrat al-Zukhruf (43), v. 28: „And He left it as a word to endure among those who came after him, that they may turn back to God". The commentary to this verse refers to two elements: one is monotheism, and the other is Abraham's descendants, who are the believers in and upholders of monotheism. Most commentators identify the monotheism referred to as Islam; with regard to the descendants of Abraham, they place the emphasis on the Arabs, the people of the Prophet Muḥammad.³⁵ Throughout his life, Abraham made pilgrimage to Mecca and observed the *ḥajj* rite, as did other members of his family – his wife Sarah, his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob – as well as the leaders of the Twelve Tribes and other prophets of Israel.³⁶ Abraham's death did not take place until he had completed the commandments of pilgrimage to Mecca; when he com-

³³) Abraham is associated with the establishment of sacred sites in Genesis 12:7, 13:18, 21:33. See Reuven FIRESTONE, *Journeys in Holy Lands: the Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (New York, 1990), 82.

³⁴) al-Marzubānī, *Nūr al-qabas*, ed. Rudolf SELLHEIM (Wiesbaden, 1964), 234; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, s. v. "Kūfa".

³⁵) al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-qur'ān*, 3rd ed. (Cairo, 1968), XXV, 63; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr* (Beirut, 1980), VII, 373; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1992), XVI, 52; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm* (Beirut, 1969), IV, 126; Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh Dimashq*, ed. Riyāḍ 'Abd al-Ḥamīd MURĀD and Rūḥiyya al-NAḤḤĀS (Damascus, 1984), III, 368.

³⁶) al-Kalā'ī, *al-Iktifā'*, ed. Muṣṭafā 'ABD AL-WAḤĪD (Cairo, 1968), I, 62.

pleted the rite, he returned to the Land of Hebron, where he died and was buried.³⁷ This tradition reminds us of Muḥammad's last pilgrimage to Mecca; after completing this journey he met his death and passed away. The pilgrimage to Mecca was not considered compulsory by the children of Abraham alone, but by other nations as well. Prophets and messengers of God not mentioned in the Bible, such as Hūd and Šālih, who were sent to Arab tribes, customarily made pilgrimage according to the tradition initiated by Abraham.³⁸ Other nations, who did not recognize the sanctity of the Ka'ba and did not fulfill the commandment of pilgrimage, such as the tribes of 'Ād, Thamūd and Shu'ayb, were doomed to extinction as a result of their unforgivable sin.³⁹ These traditions undoubtedly reflect the universal dimension of pilgrimage in Islamic religion. But at the same time they show that this universalism originated in some basic way in the *dīn Ibrāhīm*, the "religion of Abraham" itself.

The notion of monotheism that Abraham received from heaven was said to be recorded in a number of scrolls that descended to him: the *ṣuḥuf* described in the Qur'ān together with the scrolls revealed to Moses (the Ten Commandments) as the "first scrolls", *al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*.⁴⁰ According to Muslim tradition, the scrolls of Abraham are included among the scriptures that preceded the Qur'ān, which were estimated at 104 books.⁴¹ As opposed to the scrolls of Moses, the *ṣuḥuf* of Abraham no longer survive; they have been lost, or rather forgotten.⁴² The Arabs thus alluded to them as a metaphor to signify forgotten things.⁴³ All that remains of them in the collective memory of the Arabs is a number of phrases and utterances focusing on moral preachings (*mawā'iz*), admonishments, and harsh criticism directed toward evil kings.⁴⁴ However, according to one

³⁷) al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1983), XII, 79.

³⁸) al-Kalā'ī, *Iktifā'*, I, 51.

³⁹) al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, I, 84.

⁴⁰) Sūrat al-Ā'lā (87), vss. 18–19.

⁴¹) al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, VIII, 489. The total number of the sacred books is divided as follows: Shīth (Seth): 50; Idris (Hanokh): 39; Abraham: 10; Moses: 10. All of them are defined as scrolls (*ṣuḥuf*). Passages from the Old Testament, New Testament, the Book of Songs and the "Furqān" are included. Another version ascribes to Abraham 20 scrolls. See al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, XII, 71; al-Tha'ālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 43–44.

⁴²) al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, ed 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad HĀRŪN, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1969), I, 98.

⁴³) al-Tha'ālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 43–44.

⁴⁴) al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, VIII 489; al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, XX, 18; al-Tha'ālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 43.

tradition, the Qur'ān includes several passages partially quoted from Abraham's scrolls.⁴⁵

The doctrine of monotheism announced by Abraham has always had its fervent proponents, who were willing to go to great lengths to ensure that it would be preserved. During the lifetime of Abraham, and soon after he established the sanctuary in Mecca, his two sons and his grandson Jacob were chosen to spread his faith among the peoples of the area. Ishmael was sent to preach it among the Arab tribes of Jurhum and Amaliq and the tribes of Yemen. Isaac was sent to the tribes living in Syria and Palestine, and Jacob was sent to the people of Canaan (Kanān).⁴⁶ On the basis of these missions, the Qur'ān and the Muslim tradition as well have included them among the ancient prophets and God's missionaries. In Muslim belief Ishmael's contribution was not limited to the dissemination of monotheism among the Arab tribes of his day; he also laid the foundations of the sacred offices related to the Ka'ba and the rite of pilgrimage, especially the *siqāya* (drink supply) and the *rifāda* (food supply) for the pilgrims.⁴⁷

In an effort to explain the origins of idolatry and stone worship in ancient Arabia, Muslim tradition links the Ishmaelite veneration of the Ka'ba and their profound religious sentiment toward Mecca with a later deviation from the pure Abrahamic monotheism. In subsequent generations, when Ishmael's descendants multiplied, Mecca was no longer able to absorb their increasing numbers. The conflicts between them over who would control this narrow strip of land, as well as the paucity of local resources, led many of them to leave the area. However, their profound belief in the sanctity of the place never ceased. Those groups who departed from Mecca each took with them one of the stones from the courtyard of the sanctuary and placed it in their new surroundings. They performed the rite of circumambulation around these stones according to the same

⁴⁵) al-Qurtubī, *Jāmi'*, XX, 18; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, VIII, 489.

⁴⁶) al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, I, 29.

⁴⁷) Abū l-Baqā' al-Hillī, *al-Manāqib al-mazyadiyya fī akhbār al-mulūk al-asadiyya*, ed. Ṣāliḥ Mūsā DARĀDIKA and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir KHURAYSĀT (Amman, 1984), I, 300. This tradition, which associates the establishment of the sacred offices with Ishmael, sharply contradicts the unanimously current tradition stating that Quṣayy, the forefather of the Quraysh tribe, was the first who established these offices. It seems that Gerald R. HAWTING did not take this tradition into consideration in his illuminating article entitled "The Sacred Offices of Mecca from Jāhiliyya to Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), 62-84.

rites they had performed around the Ka'ba. Their connection to the actual Ka'ba, however, was not severed, and they observed the custom of visiting it in order to fulfill the commandment of pilgrimage. Over the years, their link to Abraham's heritage loosened and their monotheistic sentiments faded. The stones that had symbolized the connection to the religion of Abraham became ritual objects in their own right, and gradually this led to the worship of deities and stones.⁴⁸

The simplistic explanation given in this tradition does not necessarily reflect the truth underlying the deviation from the monotheistic heritage bequeathed by Abraham to the Arabs; rather, it reflects influence of the pagan environment on the religious belief of the Arab tribes that wandered through the desert expanses to the north and northeast of the Peninsula. The presence of "Ishmaelites" in the southeastern Jordan Valley, the Negev, al-'Araba, and the Sinai Desert is mentioned in the Bible; in that context, "Ishmael" was more or less a collective name for the nomadic camel-herding tribes that frequented the area.⁴⁹ The cuneiform inscriptions from the mid-ninth century BC and subsequent centuries reveal their rise as a political power in the eastern Mediterranean, and present a clear picture of their takeover of the spice trade, thanks to their cooperation with the kingdoms that existed in al-Shām and southern Syria.⁵⁰

The interaction between Abrahamic monotheism and superstitious beliefs, especially idol worship, is clearly revealed in the Islamic tradition, which relates the story of the beginning of polytheism and its spread to Mecca. The story appears in a *ḥadīth* ascribed to the Prophet, in which the Prophet foresees that a certain man, identified as 'Amr ibn Luḥayy and named as the one who seized the post of *siyāda* (chieftainship) in Mecca, is doomed to hell for having corrupted the monotheistic heritage of Ishmael.⁵¹ It was this man who brought the first idols from the area of the hot springs in the southern Golan Heights. He placed them in the sacred courtyard below the Ka'ba, after a healing visit to the hot springs, where he had heard the local populace talking about how idols ensure

⁴⁸ Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣnām*, 6; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī l-Dīn 'ABD AL-ḤAMĪD (Cairo, 1963), I, 51.

⁴⁹ GOITEIN, *Jews and Arabs*, 21–22.

⁵⁰ John VAN SETERS, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (London, 1975), 35–36.

⁵¹ Ibn Hishām, I, 50; al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, I, 100–101; al-Maṣūḍī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. C. BARBIER DE MEYNARD and A. PAVET DE COURTEILLE (Paris, 1861–71), III, 115.

crop fertility and victory over one's enemies.⁵² The tradition claims that the same man brought five idols from the vicinity of Jedda, on the commercial route along the Red Sea coast from Yemen in the south to the southern Jordan and the Gulf of 'Aqaba in the north. He distributed these idols to five Arab tribes, which established them in their own territories.⁵³

In both cases the transportation of the idols to the area of the Meccan sanctuary was attributed to a leader of Mecca who belonged to the dominant commercial bourgeoisie. Both cases constitute a model for the dissemination of beliefs in the ancestral era, a process enabled by two crucial factors: trade connections and the mobility of the camel caravans. Furthermore, we learn from both cases that the shift from monotheism to idolatry within the periphery of Mecca was a matter of bourgeois interest, political and commercial as well.

Tradition assures us, however, that for the Arabs the switch to idolatry was not total: they did not completely abandon the tradition of Abraham's monotheistic faith. The most prominent of the rituals associated with this faith was the commandment of pilgrimage instituted by Abraham, including all the rites accompanying this ritual, aside from the change in the formula of *talbiya* originally propounded by Abraham.⁵⁴ When the idols were brought to the area of the *ḥaram* ("sanctuary") they established them in the courtyard around the Ka'ba.⁵⁵ The principal idol, Hubal, was located inside the sanctuary itself.⁵⁶ The fact that the idols were positioned within the confines of the Ka'ba, rather than outside that sacred area, indicates that the people of Mecca were not convinced of the independent and absolute sanctity of these idols, and that they hoped to instill in them some of the inherent holiness of the Ka'ba, the symbol of monotheism.

The amended version of the tribal *talbiya* intended in the first place to emphasize an element of common belief between the pagan deities and the supreme God.⁵⁷ To a certain extent it included an emphasis on the in-

⁵²) Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣṇām*, 8; Ibn Ḥishām, I, 50–51.

⁵³) Ibn Ḥabīb, *Munammaq*, 405–407; al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, I, 18.

⁵⁴) Ibn Ḥishām, I, 51; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣṇām*, 6; al-Azraqī, *Akḥbār Makka*, I, 116; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, II, 188.

⁵⁵) It was reported that Muḥammad destroyed 360 idols when he conquered Mecca; these idols had been erected by the people of Mecca around the Ka'ba. See al-Azraqī, *Akḥbār Makka*, I, 120–21.

⁵⁶) Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣṇām*, 28; Ibn Ḥishām, I, 117.

⁵⁷) KISTER, "Labbayka", 47–49.

feriority of the idols relative to the exalted status of the supreme God, to whom the *talbiya* refers as having exclusive control over the idols.⁵⁸ The rituals conducted by the Arabs in front of Hubal, the principle idol, were of a certain monotheistic colouring, since they were presented as part of the heritage of Abraham and Ishmael. This is attested by the joint image of Abraham and Ishmael; both were depicted carrying arrows in their hands, in order to cast lots at the feet of Hubal. This portrait was said to have been drawn on one of the walls of the Ka'ba on the day when Muḥammad entered the temple after the conquest of Mecca.⁵⁹ All of the above clearly indicates that the transition from monotheism to paganism took place in the shadow of the monotheistic heritage that the forefathers of the Muslims associated with Abraham and Ishmael.

The heritage of Abrahamic monotheism did not die out when it became mingled with the worship of deities practiced by some descendants of Ishmael. The historical memory of the Arabs did not forget their forefathers, and they took pains to preserve the religious heritage of Abraham, referred to in Arabic terminology as *dīn Ibrāhīm*, the "religion of Abraham". The *ḥadīths* ascribed to the Prophet forbade Muslims to curse or defame any of those forefathers for having adhered to the religion of Abraham. Among those was Ma'add ibn 'Adnān. Muslim tradition is incapable of evaluating the period of time that elapsed between his life and that of Ishmael, and gives us no more than a rough estimate of thirty generations.⁶⁰ Tradition states that two of Ma'add's descendants who were actually the forefathers of two huge tribal federations, known as Rabī'a and Muḍar, had preserved the remnants of the faith of Abraham.⁶¹ This is, in fact, the reason why it is forbidden to curse these eponymous personalities, according to the Prophet's *ḥadīth*.⁶²

⁵⁸) The following phrase: *tamlīkuhu wa-mā malak* ("Thou possess him and that which is his"), which appears in the Jāhili formulae, indicates the inferiority of those partners (idols), to God.

⁵⁹) Ibn Manzūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta'riḥ Dimashq*, III, 371; al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, I, 165-66; al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, ed. Marsden JONES (Oxford, 1966), II, 834; al-Dhababī, *al-Sīra*, ed. Ḥusām ad-Dīn AL-QUDSĪ (Beirut, 1981), 37: The above tradition was designed to serve as a monotheistic seal to pagan practice, and there is no solid basis for stating that the ritual of casting arrows was Abrahamic, as claimed by RUBIN in his article, "Ḥanifiyya and Ka'ba", 85-112.

⁶⁰) Abū l-Baqā', *al-Manāqib al-mazyadiyya*, I, 334.

⁶¹) Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣnām*, 13; Abū l-Baqā', *al-Manāqib al-mazyadiyya*, I, 334.

⁶²) al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, I, 27; Abū l-Baqā', *al-Manāqib al-mazyadiyya*, I, 347; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḥ al-Ya'qūbī* (Beirut, 1960), I, 26.

One of the forefathers, Elias, whose name also appears among the people whom it is forbidden to curse, is named as making great efforts to bring the Arabs back to the fold of their forefathers' faith. Thanks to the status and high esteem he enjoyed among his own people, he succeeded in bringing them back to the fold of the pristine traditional law, as promulgated by Abraham and Ishmael. Moreover, he was also responsible for instituting new ritual norms, which contributed to intensifying the sanctity of the Ka'ba according to the concept instituted by Abraham.⁶³

Dīn Ibrāhīm as an overall expression of the Abrahamic heritage is not restricted to the religious-spiritual plane centered around the rites relating to the Ka'ba. The Abrahamic heritage actually concerned itself with other spheres as well, such as social interaction, morals and standards. We are told that hospitality, the cornerstone of tribal society's value system known through the collective *murūwwa* institution, was practiced in an exemplary manner by Abraham. His unprecedented action in welcoming the angels to his tent and refusing to accept anything in exchange for his hospitality,⁶⁴ we are told, became a value and virtue that was passed on to the Arabs.⁶⁵ The moral element in Abrahamic tradition as perceived by the Arabs was reflected in their clear stand against any manifestation of oppression and injustice and their unwavering support of the oppressed against their oppressors.⁶⁶ It was customary for them to form alliances in order to accomplish this goal.⁶⁷ In his youth the Prophet himself was an eyewitness to the ceremonial meeting held in Mecca to make such an alliance. It was referred to as *ḥilf al-fudūl*, the "alliance of mercies", because the parties involved pledged to support oppressed people, whether they were natives of the area or came from foreign regions, and also committed themselves to stand against oppression until justice had been restored.⁶⁸

Islamic tradition emphasizes that the pre-Islamic arabs used to follow the heritage of Abraham in matters of personal law, such as marriage, di-

⁶³) al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, I, 27; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 227-28; Abū l-Baqā', *al-Manāqib al-mazyadiyya*, I, 349.

⁶⁴) Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta'rikh Dimashq*, III, 363; Ibn Rusta, *al-A'lāq al-nafisa*, 177.

⁶⁵) al-Tha'libī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 245.

⁶⁶) al-Kalā'i, *Iktifā'*, I, 91.

⁶⁷) Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhri AL-NAJ-JĀR (Beirut, 1973), 113.

⁶⁸) Ibn Hishām, I, 87; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-muḥabbar*, ed. Ilse LICHTENSTÄDTER (Hyderabad, A. H. 1362), 167; Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Kitāb al-awā'il*, ed. Muḥammad al-Sayyid AL-WAKĪL (Tantā, 1987), 58-60.

voiced, the size of ransom, the prohibition against marrying women from one's own nuclear or extended family, and purity and impurity after sexual relations.⁶⁹ As for the commandments and customs related to the human body, tradition has it that the Arabs acted as Abraham had with regard to his own body, in order to withstand the test of physical purity as a standard for mental and spiritual purity. In the commentary to Surat Hūd (11), v. 124: "And when God tried Abraham with things, he fulfilled them all", tradition states that the test of purity was composed of ten parts: five involving the head and five involving the body. Those of the head included trimming the mustache, rinsing the mouth, clearing the nose, using a toothpick, and parting the hair; those of the body included trimming the nails, trimming pubic and underarm hair, washing the body sources of urination and defecation, and circumcision.⁷⁰ Another passage includes an explicit statement that Abraham was the first human being to perform these actions on his own body. Re-examination of the commandments said have been observed by pre-Islamic Arabs as compared to the personal religious duties in Islam reveals an absolute identity between the religion of Islam and the heritage of Abraham.⁷¹ That is, the early Muslims considered that many of their duties in these areas could be traced back to a monotheistic tradition associated with Abraham.

The circumcision ceremony is considered the most important act of purification in Islamic tradition. When God commanded Abraham to purify himself, he went to perform ablution (*wuḍūʿ*), an act of purification performed by Muslims before a prayer. God commanded him to purify himself again, and he removed his impurities. When God commanded him a third time, he went and was circumcised.⁷² Circumcision, in comparison with other practices, is much older and more severe. All Arabs, men and women alike, practiced this rite, which subsequently became a custom among the Arabs.⁷³

⁶⁹ Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*, 111.

⁷⁰ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, I, 273; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Muḥabbar*, 329; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Cairo, 1958), VIII, 81.

⁷¹ al-Jarrāʾī, *Kitāb al-awāʾil*, ed. ʿĀdil AL-FARJĀT (Damascus, 1988), 31–32.

⁷² Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar taʾrīkh Dimashq*, III, 369.

⁷³ al-Jāhīz, *Ḥayawān*, VII, 27. Circumcision, *khitān*, was referred to in the Qurʾān by the term *ṣibghat Allāh*. This term was used in order to show the Muslims that it was the best method of purification, as opposed to the Christian ritual of immersion. See Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mushkil al-Qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad ṢAQR, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1973), 149. See RUBIN, "Ḥanīfiyya and Kaʿba", 104, on the antiquity of this rite among the Arabs.

The religious elements of the Abrahamic heritage were not restricted to pilgrimage and its associated rites.⁷⁴ In addition, they included the *qibla*, or direction of the prayer. Those Arabs who adhered to *dīn Ibrāhīm*, referred to by Muslim tradition as *ḥanīfiyya*, faced the direction of the Ka'ba when praying, since this had been considered Abraham's *qibla*.⁷⁵ As for the prayers themselves, pre-Islamic reports refer to two prayers that Arabs used to pray prior to the establishment of Islam: *al-ḍuḥā* and *al-ʿaṣr*.⁷⁶ Arabs considered the afternoon prayer (*al-ʿaṣr*) to be related to Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son Ishmael. After Ishmael's redemption by heaven, Abraham prayed to God in gratitude for saving his son's life; since then, this prayer has been recited in order to express atonement and to appease God.⁷⁷ The forenoon prayer (*al-ḍuḥā*), which is uttered when the sun is at its zenith, is also ascribed to Abraham.⁷⁸ This prayer was familiar to urban Arabs, especially those of Mecca, and it was commonly recited among the Bedouin tribesmen as well.⁷⁹ It was primarily a prayer of thanksgiving.⁸⁰ It should be noted here that also associated with Abraham was the promulgation of holy months (*al-ashhur al-ḥurum*), in which hostilities were prohibited in order to provide safety and security on roads and trade routes, in markets and at sites of religious gathering. These months were viewed as an arrangement instituted by Abraham and became part of his heritage.⁸¹

Fasting was also a religious commandment during the *jāhiliyya* period, especially during the month of Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Islamic tradition, however, is dividing in regard to Rajab's sanctity in Islam. According to one tradition it is considered as a

⁷⁴ The rituals of the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), which Islam adopted, were said to be Abraham's rituals. See Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh Dimashq*, III, 361; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, V, 177.

⁷⁵ Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. Eduard SACHAU *et. al.* (Leiden, 1904-40), III.1, 276.

⁷⁶ For more details on the two prayers in Jāhiliyya and early Islam before the *hijra* from Mecca to Medina, see Uri RUBIN, "Morning and Evening Prayers in Early Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987), 40-64.

⁷⁷ 'Alī Dāda, *Muḥāḍarāt al-awā'il*, 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1978), 92.

⁷⁸ Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh Dimashq*, III, 362, 369.

⁷⁹ al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, I, 113; al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, I, 430; al-Maqrizī, *Imtā' al-asmā'*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad SHAKIR, 2nd ed. (Qatar, n. d.), 16-17.

⁸⁰ 'Alī, *Mufaṣṣal*, VI, 337; RUBIN, "Morning and Evening Prayers".

⁸¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, IX, 98; Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Laṭā'if al-ma'ārif* (Cairo, A. H. 1343), 118.

holy month, and the fact that it was holy during the *jāhiliyya* does not detract from its holiness in Islam. Another version, however, states that this fact is enough to remove its holy status in Islam.⁸² Fasting as a religious rite was known to certain parts of pre-Islamic tribal society, where it comprised a part of the rite of seclusion near idols or at ritual sites and was associated with the healing of diseases.⁸³

Another type of fast was familiar to the people of Quraysh, the residents of Mecca, who used to fast on the tenth day of the first Arabic month, al-Muḥarram. On this day, known as 'Āshūrā', the Meccans used to celebrate and change the covering of the Ka'ba. The Prophet Muḥammad himself fasted on 'Āshūrā' prior to Islam; when he emigrated to Medina, he continued the custom until he was commanded to fast during the month of Ramaḍān. He then ceased to fast on 'Āshūrā'.⁸⁴

This account sheds new light on the reason behind the fasting of 'Āshūrā'. It contradicts another account transmitted in al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, which links it with the Jewish fast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It also refutes the position argued by some modern scholars, according to which Muḥammad's original concern was Judaism, or rather, by declaring a fast on 'Āshūrā' he intended to appease the Jews of Medina.⁸⁵

Two elements are traditionally mentioned in connection with the fast on this day. The first claims that the fast was practiced in order to atone for a sin committed by the people of Mecca. Another version states that the Meccans wished to thank God for having saved them from severe droughts.⁸⁶ The second element is the covering of the Ka'ba, which was customarily changed on that day. The connection between the fast and the covering rite indicates that the fast was part of ancient religious customs, as proposed by al-Ālusī.⁸⁷ These customs appear to allude to the religious heritage of Abraham, due to their connection to the Ka'ba.

The role of an Abrahamic heritage in the awareness of the Arabs, especially those living within Arabia, did not preclude the introduction of their religious beliefs. The Arabs' exposure to other religious and secular cultures in the Mediterranean basin, both through trade connections and

⁸² M. J. KISTER, "'Rajab is the Month of God': a Study in the Persistence of an Early Tradition", *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971), 191-223.

⁸³ 'ĀLĪ, *Mufaṣṣal*, VI, 337.

⁸⁴ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, III, 57.

⁸⁵ WENSINCK, *Muḥammad and the Jews of Medina*, 88-89; ANDRAE, *Muḥammad: the Man and his Faith*, 136-37.

⁸⁶ 'ĀLĪ, *Mufaṣṣal*, II, 340.

⁸⁷ AL-ĀLUSĪ, *al-Mukhtār min bulūgh al-'arab* (Cairo, n. d.), 110.

as a result of physical-geographical proximity, paved the way for the infiltration of monotheistic and non-monotheistic religions. Entire Arab tribes, sub-tribes and urban groups converted to Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism.⁸⁸ Examination of the tribal-religious map shows that these three religions did not penetrate deep into the Arabian peninsula. Rather, they were mainly localized on its fringes: to the east, in areas bordering on the Persian Gulf; to the south, in areas close to Yemen and Ethiopia; and to the north, in regions close to southern Palestine and Jordan. The one exception, of course, was the Medina area, where Judaism was the dominant religion. The heart of the Ḥijāz region, and especially the urban centers of Mecca and al-Taʿīf and the tribes on their periphery, were not exposed to this influence. The Arab so-called religion (*dīn al-ʿarab*) continued to prevail there to a significant degree just prior to the rise of Islam and shortly before the appearance of Muḥammad; this area, primarily its urban residents, experienced the phenomenon of *ḥanīfiyya*, the beliefs of a group of people who expressed doubts over the prevailing faith and sought to return to the original monotheism – more precisely, to the original version of *dīn Ibrāhīm*.⁸⁹ Without going into the terminological and semantic development of the term *ḥanīf*, which has been dealt with extensively by various scholars, both philologists and historians, it should be stated that this expression, as used by the Prophet's contemporaries, reflected adherence to the religion of Abraham, which was different from *shirk*, the polytheistic belief adopted by the Arabs, and different from both Judaism and Christianity.⁹⁰ The phenomenon of

⁸⁸) al-Ibshihī, *al-Mustaṭraf* (Cairo, A. H. 1397), I, 78; Ibn Saʿīd al-Andalusī, *Nashwat al-ṭarab fī taʾrīkh jāhiliyyat al-ʿarab*, ed. Naṣrat ʿABD AL-RAḤMĀN (Amman, 1982), I, 327; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, 257; ʿALĪ, *Mufaṣṣal*, VI, 514, 586–92, 629–30, 692–94; TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 248–51, 258–307.

⁸⁹) The issue of *ḥunafāʾ* (sing. *ḥanīf*) has been treated by several modern scholars. Some of them refer to the Muslim traditions concerning the *ḥunafāʾ* with suspicion, while others accept the authenticity of these reports. See W. Montgomery WATT, “Ḥanīf”, *El*²; ANDRAE, *Mohammed: the Man and his Faith*, 108–13; FUECK, “The Originality of the Arabian Prophet”, 86–98; M. J. KISTER, “A Bag of Meat”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33 (1970), 267–75; RUBIN, “Ḥanīfiyya and Kaʿba”, 85–112. On the development of the term, see Nabih Amin FĀRIS, “Taṭawwur maʾnā kalimat ḥanīf al-Qurʾāniyya”, *al-Abḥāth* 13 (Beirut, 1960), 25–42.

⁹⁰) Abū ʿUbayda, *Majāz al-Qurʾān*, ed. M. Fuat SEZGIN (Cairo, 1988), I, 58; al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān AL-WAKĪL (Cairo, 1967), I, 292–93. WATT argues that there was a form of the word *ḥanīf* in the language of the Naba-

ḥanīfiyya symbolized the transformation that was spreading in Arab religious thought. The tribal beliefs based on magical powers could no longer provide a response to the religious sentiments and needs developing among the Arabs. Local tribal holy places and temples began to lose their religious and ritual value and gave way to central places of worship common to a larger number of tribes, such as the Ka'ba. The seasonal gathering at these sites increased the feeling of religious exuberance, emphasized the inferiority of the local religions centered around the tribal deities, and contributed to the increased recognition of the supreme God whose power and activity were relevant to all.⁹¹ The *ḥanīfiyya*, in this sense, was an expression of pre-Islamic Arab monotheism, which cannot definitively be said to have resulted from any Jewish or Christian influence.⁹² On the contrary, this monotheism was presented in a new and independent form, as a precursor of Islam.⁹³

Muḥammad initially refrained from demanding that those to whom he addressed his message accept new and revolutionary ideas, which could have conflicted with components of their religious thought. He employed the religious symbolism already familiar to them, which carried the emotional charge of its heritage, in order to shift this religious symbolism from the task of representing an animistic agenda to that of promoting monotheism.⁹⁴

In the initial stages of his activity Muḥammad referred to the religion he was announcing as *ḥanīfiyya*, before changing its name to Islam.⁹⁵ In other words, he considered that he was adhering to the same religion – even calling it by the same name – as that promoted by the *ḥanīfs* of

taeans, which meant a follower of some branch of their partially Hellenized Syro-Arabian religion. Such a person might have been regarded as a "pagan" (which is what the Syriac form of the word means) by the Christians and yet, from another point of view, might justifiably have been considered a monotheist. See WATT, *What is Islam*, 86; ALĪ, *Mufaṣṣal*, VI, 508.

⁹¹) GIBB, "The Structure of Religious Thought in Islam", 187–88.

⁹²) GIBB, *Mohammedanism*, 26; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Munammaq*, 285.

⁹³) FUECK, "The Originality of the Arabian Prophet", 86–98.

⁹⁴) GIBB, "The Structure of Religious Thought in Islam", 187–88.

⁹⁵) GIBB, *Mohammedanism*, 26, referring to an early variant reading of a Qur'ānic verse. *Ḥanīfiyya* as the name of the new religion preached by Muḥammad was also mentioned in early *ḥadīths*. See Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāya fī gharīb al-ḥadīth*, ed. Ṭāhir AL-ZĀWĪ and Maḥmūd M. AL-ṬINĀḤĪ (Cairo, 1963), I, 451; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, s.v. "ḥ.n.f."; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa* (Cairo, n.d.), I, 19.

Mecca and other urban centers.⁹⁶ This term is repeated several times in the Qurʾān as referring uniquely to Abraham.⁹⁷ Despite the fact that many prophets and messengers prior to Muḥammad who had attempted to revive the Abrahamic tradition had claimed this term as their own, Muḥammad viewed himself as the sole heir of the original and undistorted *dīn Ibrāhīm*.⁹⁸

The connection between Muḥammad and Abraham is born out by other indicative evidence as well, as reflected in experiences attributed to both of them during their respective periods as heralds of a new faith. Both experienced migration (*ḥijra*) from the land of their birth, for reasons related to their religious ideology.⁹⁹ Both received the word of God in the same month. The scrolls of Abraham, the *ṣuḥuf*, descended from heaven in the month of Ramaḍān – the same month in which the revelation of the Qurʾān began.¹⁰⁰ And just as Abraham transformed Mecca into a *ḥaram*, a sacred precinct, Muḥammad transformed Medina into a *ḥaram*, emphasizing that he was acting as Abraham had in Mecca.¹⁰¹ The distinctive title given to Abraham, “God’s friend” (*khalīl Allāl*), was also given to the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁰² Indeed, the similarities between the Prophet Muḥammad and Abraham transcended the realm of experience

⁹⁶) Ḥassān ibn Thābit, *Dīwān*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān AL-BARQŪQĪ (Cairo, 1929), 8; Ibn Hishām, IV, 878.

⁹⁷) W. Montgomery WATT, “Ḥanīf”, EI²; Paret, “Ibrāhīm”.

⁹⁸) GIBB, *Mohammedanism*, 31.

⁹⁹) DĀDA, *Muḥāḍarāt al-awā’il*, 33.

¹⁰⁰) al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, XII, 75; Sūrat al-Baqara (2), v. 185. It was reported that all the sacred books were revealed during Ramaḍān; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, I, 456.

¹⁰¹) For more on the foundation of the *ḥaram* of Mecca by Abraham, see ibn Ḥabīb, *Munammaq*, 280; al-Azraqī, *Akḥbār Makka*, I, 65. The *ḥaram* of Medina was founded by Muḥammad after his arrival there from Mecca; see al-Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, I, 22; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, s. v. “Lāba”. In *ḥadīths* attributed to the Prophet, the founding of Medina’s *ḥaram* is described as similar to the foundation of Mecca’s *ḥaram* by Abraham; see al-Samhūdī, *Khulāṣat al-wafā* (Cairo, A. H. 1285), 24–25.

¹⁰²) al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, II, 705. The epithet of Kahlīl is mentioned in Sūrat al-Nisā’ (4), v. 125 and has been translated as “friend” in English and “*yedid*” in Hebrew (Yousef REVLIN). The Muslim tradition presents different views with regard to the significance of his epithet. The most distinguished interpretation has been produced by al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasā’il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad HĀRŪN (Cairo, 1979), III, 339–40. See also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, II, 706; Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta’rīkh Dīkāshğ*, III, 362–63; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, I, 373–74.

and actions, and was extended to physical similarities as well. Muslim tradition portrays Muḥammad's physical appearance as identical to that of Abraham.¹⁰³ The similarity was so precise that Muḥammad's footprints were claimed to have been the same size and shape as those of Abraham. When Muḥammad was pursued by the people of Quraysh on his way from Mecca to Medina, they noticed that his foot prints exactly matched those of Abraham, which were engraved on the *maqām*, the stone on which he stood when he built the walls of the Ka'ba.¹⁰⁴

The question that remains, of course, is what the historian is to make of all this source material, and with this issue I will conclude.

To return to the thesis of SNOUCK, we must bear in mind that his purpose was never to argue that the image of Abraham was not important in the early years of the Prophet's career, but rather to argue that once Muḥammad was in Medina the role of Abraham increased dramatically where matters touching upon the pilgrimage to Mecca – the subject of SNOUCK's dissertation – were concerned. We may further note that in SNOUCK's days many important works, including most of those cited above, were still unpublished or even unknown to modern scholarship, and that the Dutch scholar worked on the basis of Arabic works available to him in Leiden when Western Islamic scholarship was still in its formative phase. Had he access to the wealth of sources available today, his conclusions may well have been different.

As noted above, the references to Abraham in the Qur'ān begin before the *hijra* and deal with significant aspects of the Islamic view of Abraham already before the Prophet's conflict with the Jews of Medina. Further, it is in numerous cases clear that the Qur'ān is not arguing anything new, but rather referring to what was already common knowledge. One would of course expect that tensions with the Jews would be reflected in an increased emphasis in the Qur'ān on Abraham, who was claimed by both sides. But this does not change the fact that Abraham was already an important figure among the Arabs by the time this conflict arose.

So in what ways was he important to the Arabs? The Islamic sources are clear on this point: he was respected as the representative of a monotheistic trend that was already well known in Arabia. One may concede that some aspects of this were embellished in the early centuries of Islamic history, but clearly they did not invent it. An example illustrating

¹⁰³) Ibn Sa'd, I.2, 125.

¹⁰⁴) al-Tha'alibi, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 120–21; Ibn Sa'd, V, 338. About *maqām ibrahīm*, see M. J. KISTER, "Maḥkam", *EI*².

this takes us to one of the many sources unknown to SNOUCK: the *Tafsīr* of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767 in al-Baṣra), which was crucial to KISTER's important article on the *talbiya*, cited several times here. Muqātil provides details on a series of tribal *talbiyas*, all of which associate recognition of the primacy of Allah with continuing belief in many lesser deities. No argument is made on the basis of this material, and it is not presented that would suggest we are dealing with stereotyped phrases invented later on in Islamic times. Muqātil simply collects and quotes the *talbiyas*, and to all appearances they were simply part of the old Arab lore that had survived to his time. It is not clear whether or how modern scholarship might be able to use this and other such information to reconstruct the history of the developing vision of Abraham in the first two centuries of Islam. What does seem to be clear is that the roots of the vision are to be found in the Medinan period of the Prophet's career, nor even in his own lifetime, but rather in the religious tradition of the Arabs of pre-Islamic times.