BLACK ARABIA &
THE AFRICAN ORIGIN OF ISLAM

BY WESLEY MUHAMMAD, PhD
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Abbreviations vii
ABD Anchor Bible Dictionary
AcOr Acta Orientalia
ANE Ancient Near East(ern) BCE Before the Common Era BP Before the Present (Day) BSOAS Bulletin for the School of Oriental and African Studies

*CAD* The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago
CE Common Era

DDD Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible
*EQ* Encyclopedia of the Qur’an
ER Encyclopedia of Religion
*ERE* Encyclopedia of Religion and ethics
HAR Hebrew Annual Review
HB Hebrew Bible
HTR Harvard Theological Review
IJMES International Journal of Middle East Studies
IOS Israel Oriental Studies

viii JANES
JANESCU
JAOS
JBL
JJS
JNES JNSL

JQR JRAS JRelS JSAI
JSS

ky
kya
LXX
MT
MW
*NOAB*
REI
Rel. Stud. TDOT

UF Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society
Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University
Journal of the American Oriental Society
Journal of Biblical Literature
Journal of Jewish Studies
Journal of Near Eastern Studies Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
Jewish Quarterly Review
Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam
Journal of Semitic Studies

Thousand years
Thousands of years ago
Sequenaqint
Masoretic Text
The Muslim World
New Oxford Annotated Bible
Revue des Etudes Islamiques
Religious Studies
Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
Ugaritische Forschungen

ix ya Years Ago

ZA Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und
Chapter One Afravia and its People

I. The Peoples of Arabia

In his ground-breaking book, The Destruction of Black Civilization, Chancellor Williams suggests that “Blacks are in Arabia for precisely the same reasons Blacks are in the United States, South America, and the Caribbean Islands-through capture and enslavement.” Archaeology, anthropology and ethno-historical studies have now demonstrated the error of this postulate. A more accurate assessment is certainly that of Runoko Rashidi who documents that:

The Arabian Peninsula…was, like much of Asia, first populated by Black people…Some of the surviving Black populations, known as the Vedoids, are major portions of the Mahra population found still in the extremities of Arabia. This suggestion of a ‘Black Arabia’ might seem counterintuitive – the Arab with which most are familiar is the very fairskinned, hawk-faced Semite (Figure 1). It is the case however that the latter shares the peninsula today with a much different type of Arab. As Major-General Maitland, Political Resident in Aden for Britain, noted in 1932:


The people of Arabia…belong to two distinct and apparently quite different races. The common idea of the Arab type (is) tall, bearded men with clean-cut hawk-like face. The Arabs of South Arabia are smaller, darker, coarser featured and nearly beardless…All authorities agree that the southern Arabs are nearly related by origin to the Abyssinians.

This black-skinned southern Arab is best represented today by the Mahra, Qara, and Shahra tribes of Oman and Hadramawt (Figures 2-4).


4 See also Baron von Maltzan’s description of the Southern Arab (“Geography of Southern Arabia,” Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London 16 [1872]: 121 [art.=115-123]: “Their complexion is almost as black as that of the Abyssinians; their bodies are very finely formed, and with slender, yet strong limbs; their faces are Semitic, noses generally aquiline, eyes full of fire, lips small, and mouths of very diminutive proportions. They are generally thin, and never fat; they have little or no beard, their hair is long, but curly, not woolly.”

5 Major-General Maitland, Preface to Wyman Bury’s The Land of Uz (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1911), xiiif.


Figures 1 Figure 2

Traditional (White) Arab Mahra Arab of South Arabia

Figures 3-4

Black Arabs from Hadramawt (South Arabia)

Undoubtedly a modified version of Arabia’s original inhabitants, these groups show an affinity to both the so-called ‘Hamites’ of East Africa (Somalis, Abyssinians) and the South Indian Dravidians, and they possibly represent a ‘genetic link’ between these two populations. These Black Arabsians should be

7 The dark South Arabian today is short and “extremely round-headed (brachycephalic)” (Henry Field, “Racial Types From South Arabia,” The Open Court 50 [1936]: 33-39) but was no doubt originally much taller and dolichocephalic. In the 13th century CE the Muslim traveler Ibn al-Mujāwir described the Mahra as “tall, handsome folk” (Tārīkh al-mustabir, ir, 271.1-17; trans. G. Rex Smith in A Traveller in Thirteenth-Century Arabia: Ibn al-Mujāwir’s Tārīkh al-mustabir[London: Ashgate, 2008] 268-69) and early pre-Christian skulls found in Hadramawt were markedly dolichocephalic (G.M. Morant, “A Description of Human Remains Excavated by Miss G. Gaton Thompson at Hureidha” in G. Gaton Thompson, The Tombs and Moon Temple of Hureidha (Hadhramaut) [Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London # 8; Oxford: University Press, 1944] 107-112; Scott, High Yemen, 2001). It has been suggested that the ‘definite change’ in the racial constitution of the people of Hadramawt resulted from the invasion and inbreeding of brachycephalic whites (Armenoids or Persians; see ibid; Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, “The
understood in the context of what 19th–20th century European adventurers and anthropologists dubbed ‘the Black Belt of mankind.’ Sir Arthur Keith, renowned anthropologist from the Field Museum of Natural History, observed:

The enigma of modern anthropology is the Black Belt of mankind. It commences in Africa and peter out amongst the natives of the Melanesian Islands of the Pacific. At each extremity of the belt, in Africa as in Melanesia we find peoples with black skins, woolly hair, more or less beardless, prognathous and long-headed. We cannot suppose these negro peoples, although now widely separated, have been evolved independently of each other. We therefore suppose that at one time a proto-negroid belt crossed the ancient world, occupying all intermediate lands, Arabia, Baluchistan, India, Further India, the Philippines and Malay Archipelago. This enigmatic “Black Belt” of mankind is the more peculiar because it apparently consists of two different parent stocks, both with Black skins but differing in almost every other ethnologic feature. The “intermediate lands” of this proto-negroid belt – the regions of West Asia, North Africa and Southern India – seem to be home to a markedly different black face than the one we generally associate with ‘Black/African’ peoples. West African scholar Cheik Anta Diop explained:

There are two well-defined Black races: one has a black skin and woolly hair; the other also has black skin, often exceptionally black, with straight hair, aquiline nose, thin lips, and acute cheekbone angle. We find a prototype of this race Socotra, trans. by Valery A. Epstein [Ithaca Press Reading, 1993] who notes that: “Socotra, and possibly all of Southern Arabia, may after all be the missing intermediate link in the race-genetic ‘west-east’ gradient for which anthropologists search in order to fill the gap between the African Negroes and the Australo-Veddo-Melanesian types in the equatorial area.” (67).


in India: the Dravidian. It is also known that certain Nubians likewise belong to the same Negro type, as this sentence by the Arab author, Edrissi, indicates: “The Nubians are the most handsome of Blacks; their women have thin lips and straight hair.”

While the (stereo) typical “negroid” stock (the Broad type; Figure 5) characterized by dark skin, a broad nose (platyrhine), full lips, prognathism (protruding upper jaw/lower face), high facial index (short broad face) and wooly (ulotricous) hair seems to have its origin in sub-Saharan Africa, the second parent stock (the Elongated type; Figure 6), characterized by exceptionally dark skin, narrow head, aquiline nose, thin lips, high cheek bones and straight or wavy hair is normally located further east. It is in India where we find the typical representative of this type in the Dravidian (Figure 7). However, North Africa is also home to such a population (the so-called Hamites). The Elongated type, called variously (erroneously) Hamitic, Mediterranean, or the Brown Race, had (also erroneously) been understood to be a brunet type of the Caucasian race and therefore ethnically distinct from the chromatically similar yet phenotypically distinct African Broad type. However, as Keith W. Crawford, M.D. has well pointed out, scientific studies calculating the degree of relatedness between world populations based on genetic similarities for certain proteins reveal that present day African populations with differing morphologies cluster together as a group distinct from other world populations. Thus sub-Saharan Senegalese (Broad type) and Ethiopians from the Horn of Africa.

( *Elongated type*) show a genetic kinship that distinguishes them from European, Asian, and indigenous American populations. Other studies suggest that the *Elongated type* itself is “a product of a long evolution in African ecosystems”. That is to say, the *Broad type* and the *Elongated type* do not actually represent two distinct parent stocks, but two morphological variations of a single, black stock. It is this African *Elongated type* to which the Black Arabian shows an affinity. Not only the original Arabian, but the original Near Easterner in general appears to have his prototype in the Dravidian that is now inhabiting India but who seems to himself have originated in Arabia.
Figure 6
Elongated type (Somali).
From Carleton S. Coon and Edward E. Hunt Jr., *The Living Races of Man* (1965)
Figure 7

Vēdān (Dravidian) of India. From Edgar Thurston, *Casts and Tribes of Southern India* (1909)


II. Afrabia

This ethnological kinship with *Elongated type* East Africans comes as no surprise: Arabia itself, we are assured, is but “the geological extension of Africa.” As Maurizio Tosi has pointed out in his discussion, “The Emerging Picture of Prehistoric Arabia”: “Physically the (Arabian) peninsula is a part of Africa, landscaped by the same geological and climate processes as the eastern Sahara and the Ethiopian highlands.” The *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains:

Western Arabia formed part of the African landmass before a rift occurred in the Earth’s crust, as a result of which the Red
Sea was formed and Africa and the Arabian Peninsula finally became separated some five to six million years ago. Thus, the southern half of the peninsula has a greater affinity with the regions of Somalia and Ethiopia in Africa than with northern Arabia or the rest of Asia.

Plate tectonics separated Africa and Arabia sometime during the Precambrian (c. 5, 000 million – 590 million BP), the Miocene (c. 25-12 million BP) or maybe as late as the Pliocene (c. 5.3 – 1.8 million BP) period when the Arabian plate broke off from the African shield, creating the Red Sea. Nevertheless Arabia remains the geological and ecological continuation of Africa.

In general, Arabia is the continuation of the African system across the Red Sea, spanning the Saharo-Arabian

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The term "Afrabia" is used here to denote that the Arabian Peninsula is essentially an extension of northeastern Africa. As Ali Mazrui notes:

Afrabia is an ethnological extension of Africa. As Michael D. Petraglia remarks, the Arabian peninsula was "a key geographic region that, without doubt, played a critical role in Out of Africa dispersals." In fact, Arabia is likely the first territory that hominids encountered as they expanded outside of the African mainland. They entered the peninsula by the south over the Bab el-Mandeb and by the north through the Levantine corridor (Figure 8). We are therefore not taken aback by the discovery that Lower Miocene (c. 17-14 million BP) hominids remains similar to those found in East Africa have been found in Arabia. Africa and Arabia would have still been connected during this time according to some theories. The faunal remains imply a tropical or subtropical climate during this time. The environment of central and eastern Arabia during the Miocene and Pliocene "has been called ‘lush’ and compared to that of a tropical Savannah." At that time, as Michael Rice suggests, "Arabia probably would have looked much like East Africa now."

Geomorphological evidence suggests great rainfall during the Pliocene (5.3 million – 1.8 million BP). Thus, prehistoric Arabia was a home-away-from-home for the early African colonists. Archaeogenetics indicates that the progenitor African group of today's human population migrated out of Africa into Arabia about 70,000 years ago. It was from Arabia, after adapting there for approximately 5000 years, that these

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Afrabians went on to populate the rest of the world.31 As Norman M. Whalen and David E. Peace point out:

whether migration proceeded by way of the north or the south, it was necessary to cross Arabia first before continuing further. For that reason, the oldest cities in the world, next to those in Africa, should be found in Arabia, which occupied a pivotal position astride the path of early intercontinental migration in Lower Pleistocene times…Arabia (is) humankind’s doorway to the world.32

Figure 8

Initial Out-of-Africa dispersal routes.

From ARMCO World43 (1992)


These early African expansionists likely belonged to the Elongated type.33 This might account for the fact that in Arabia and Western Asia in general – lands which were among the African expansionists’ earliest colonies – the indigenous populations are of this Elongated African variety. As U.P. and Susheela Upadhyaya explain:

It is now generally accepted that in the Neolithic and early metal ages about 8th to 3rd millennia BC, the vast region of Western Asia with its extensions up to the Niles and Indus, was occupied by what may be called a blackish race with its local variations like Proto-Mediterranean, Mediterranean and Hamite. This race is characterized by blackish brown complexion, long head, long straight and narrow face, etc…In spite of some local differences like the Proto-Mediterranean type in Egypt and India, Hamitic type in East-Africa and Ibero-insular Mediterranean type from Anatolia to Western India, we can see, on the whole a fundamental racial and cultural unity in all this part of the ancient world which is rightly called the ‘cradle of civilization’.34

It was no doubt this Black Elongated type which was the original population of the whole of Arabia and from which the darkskinned southern Arab of today derived.35

St. Clair Drake, Black Folks Here and There, vols. (Los Angeles: Center For AfroAmerican Studies University of California, 1987) I:121f; “Although some cogent reasons have been cited for believing that homo habilis and other African hominids were dark skinned, the oldest human fossils do not meet the anthropometric criteria for negroes, or any variety of modern man, for that matter. As to where and when the Negro type first appeared with its distinctive blackish brown complexion, long head, long straight and narrow face, etc…in spite of some local differences like the Proto-Mediterranean type in Egypt and India, Hamitic type in East-Africa and Ibero-insular Mediterranean type from Anatolia to Western India, we can see, on the whole a fundamental racial and cultural unity in all this part of the ancient world which is rightly called the ‘cradle of civilization’.

Whence cometh the white Arab? Bertram Thomas, historian and former Prime Minister of Muscat and Oman, reports:

The original inhabitants of Arabia…were not the familiar Arabs of our time but a very much darker people. A proto-negroid belt of mankind stretched across the ancient world from Africa to Malay. This belt…(gave) rise to the Hamitic peoples of Africa, to the Dravidian peoples of India, and to an intermediate dark people inhabiting the Arabian peninsula. In the course of time two big migrations of fair-skinned peoples came from the north…to break through and transform the dark belt of man beyond India (and) to drive a wedge between India and Africa…The more virile invaders overcame the dark-skinned peoples, absorbing most of them, driving others southwards…The cultural condition of the newcomers is unknown. It is unlikely that they were more than wild hordes of adventurous hunters.36

Among these white hordes were the Kassites (Figure 9), probably originating in the Zargos Mountains region in Iran, who invaded from the north and colonized eastern Arabia for about a century and a half (15th-13th cent. BCE).37 As François Lenormant recounts, the original ‘Kushite’ Arabians absorbed these ‘coarse, white’ invaders, Jectanides as he calls them, the latter eventually gained victory over the Arabian Kushites.38 These white tribes settled among the original Black Arabians, learning their language and culture and becoming ‘arabized’ (musta’ribah),39 but other... Ancient and Modern in Southwestern Asia (Coral Gables, Fl: University of Miami Press, 1956) 113.

White invaders to Arabia in the second millennium BCE: Kassites (left) and Sabaeans 41 (right)

IV. Afrabia and the Black Semites

Al abārī (d. 923), the famed Muslim historian and Qurānic exegete, recorded in his Ta rīkh al-rusul wa l-muluk (“The History of the Messengers and Kings”) the following on the authority of Ābd Allāh b. Ābbās, the cousin of the prophet Mu'āmmad of Arabia:

40 See e.g. Dr. Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, “The Physical Character of the Arabs: Their Relations with Ancient Persians,” Anthropological Society of Bombay 11 (1919) 724-768.
41 These ‘White’ Sabaeans are no doubt the successors (and appropriators) of the original ‘Black’ Sabaeans.

The Children of Sam (Shem) settled in the center of the Earth, which is between Satīdīma and the sea and between Yemen and Syria. Allah made the prophets from them, revealed the Books to them, made them beautiful, gave them a black complexion, and also gave them a black complexion with a light-brownish undertone...The children of Ham settled in the south...Allah gave them a black complexion and gave some of them a black complexion with a light-brownish undertone...The children of Japheth settled in Safoun toward the north...They are lightskinned and very fair-skinned. 42

That the Semites, along with the so-called ‘Hamites,’ were originally a Black people is pretty clear. “Semitic” is properly a linguistic designation, not racial, and describes native speakers of one of the several living or dead Semitic languages. But Danna Reynolds observation here is critical: “the indigenous or ‘black’ tribes of Arabia were those who in ancient times migrated from Africa...and were the earliest purveyers and dispersers of the Semitic dialects.” 43 The Semitic family of languages, the most widespread of which is Arabic, is a branch of a larger language phylum called Afroasiatic which consists of the Semitic, Ancient Egyptian, Berber, Cushitic, Omotic and Chadic families. While some scholars maintain that Afroasiatic originated in Asia, 44 most linguists now accept that it originated in Africa where five of the six generally recognized branches still reside. 45 Regarding the Semitic branch in particular, a number of scholars postulate an African origin of the linguistic family and its speakers. 46 Renowned Russian linguist Igor M. Diankonoff argued that the origin of the Afroasiatic family, including the Semitic languages, was in the north-western part of the modern Republic of the Sudan. 47 The Semites were said to have been a group of East Africans who branched off from the Proto-Afroasiatic stock in Africa and migrated to Syria-Palestine in 9th-8th millennium BCE. Later Diankonoff modified his position: still maintaining that North Africa is the origin of the Afroasiatic family in general, he moved the origin of the Proto-Semitic language to the area between the Nile Delta and Palestine, to where a group branched off from the parent Afroasiatic stock, migrated to the Levant area, and then became ‘Semitized,’ if you will. 48 Diankonoff points to the archaeological and architectural remains of the Jericho culture of 8th-7th millennium BCE Palestine as part of this early ‘Common Semitic’ culture. Earlier

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George A. Barton already spoke of the “African origin and Arabian cradle-land of the Semites," suggesting that the Afroasiatic (or to use the old term ‘Hamito- Semitic’) protolanguage originated in Africa, from which a group migrated to Africa forming the Semitic languages. The final word on this matter is probably that of Peter Bellwood from the Australian National University: "Proto-Semitic is undoubtedly of Levant origin". That is to say, a group of African Afroasiatic speakers migrated northeast into the Levant and there evolved the Proto-Semitic language, maybe as early as the 8th millennium BCE. It is appropriate to note here that Levantine populations, from the Natufians of the 11th millennium BCE to the Transjordan Kushites of the second, were Black peoples of the elongated type.


Now these were not wandering nomads: the Proto-Semitic lexicon does not present a necessarily nomadic group, but suggests sedentism.

The Semitic languages, after evolving in Afrabia, reentered Africa proper. Semitic languages have been spoken in Ethiopia for at least four thousand years, and “Most linguists agree that Proto-Ethiopian originated through contact between one group of South Semites, which settled on the Tigrean plateau, and local Cushitic populations.” While it is going too far to say, as did W.F. Albright in 1918, that ancient Egyptian is “a Semitic tongue,” it is most certainly the case that the genetic relationship of Egyptian and the Semitic is solidly established...The regular phonological and semantic correspondences between the morphological systems of the Egyptian and the Semitic clearly demonstrate that these two language families are related.


Aaron D. Rubin, “An Outline of Comparative Egypto-Semitic Morphology,” Egyptian and Semito-Hamitic (Afro-Asiatic) Studies (Brill, 2004): 454-486. See also Carleton T. Hodge, “An Egyptian-Semitic Comparison”, Folia Orientalia 17 (1976): 5-28: “The language groups known as Semitic, Egyptian, Chadic and Berber are genetically related, deriving from a common proto-language...Egyptian...is closely related to Semitic.” Thus, the relationship between Semitic and ancient Egyptian is not "superficial" as suggested by Brunson. Predynastic Egypt, 67.

IV.1. Arabic, Language of Black Semites

According to Muslim tradition the ancient peoples of Afrabia originally consisted of twelve tribes: Ād, Thamūd, asm, Imlīq, Immīm, Jāsim, Jurhum, Abīl, Jadīs, U , Jāthir, Shālikh. These constitute the hā idāor the now “extinct” Arabs.
These tribes were the first to speak Arabic and are therefore called *al-arab al-āriba*, the “true Arabians,” in contrast to *al-arab al-musta riba* “arabized Arabians”, those foreign immigrants to Arabia who learned Arabic only after settling among “the true Arabs.” As al *abarī* noted: “The Arabs called these nations the āriba Arabs because the Arabic language was their original language, whereas they called the children of Ishmael b. Abraham the musta riba Arabs because they only spoke these peoples’ languages after they had settled among them.”

The first to speak Arabic, we are told, was ʿImtiq. That these āriba Arabs were Black is well documented in the Classical Arabic/Islamic sources. Ibn Man ʿūr (d. 1311), author of the most authoritative classical Arabic lexicon, *Lisān al-ārab*, notes the opinion that the phrase *aswād al-jilda*, ‘Blackskinned,’ idiomatically meant *khāli al arab*, “the pure Arabs,” “because the color of most of the Arabs is dark (*al-udma*).” In other words, blackness of skin among the Arabs suggested purity

Of Arab ethnicity. Likewise, the famous grammarian from the century prior, Muhammad b. Barr ḫār (d. 1193) noted that an *akh aror* black-skinned Arab was “a pure Arab (*arabī ma*)” with a pure genealogy, “because Arabs describe their color as black (*al-aswād*) and the color of the non-Arabs (*alajam*, i.e. Persians) as red (*al umra*).” Finally Al-Jahiz, in his *Fakhr al-sūdān alā l-bidan,* (“The Boast of the Blacks over the Whites”) declared: “The Arabs pride themselves in (their) black color, *al arab tafkhar bi-sawād al-lawn*.”

Jewish Rabbis of the 5th/6th centuries CE also knew the Arabs to be Black. Rabbi Akiba, famous first century Rabbi who is said to have visited Arabia, is presented in a 5th/6th century Jewish text commenting on Numbers 5:19, a passage dealing with how one knows if a wife has committed adultery. The Jewish (midrashic) text *Numbers Rabbah* says:

The King of the Arabs put this question to R. Akiba: “I am black (kūšī) and my wife is black (kūšīt), yet she gave birth to a white son. Shall I kill her for having played the harlot while lying with me?”

As Jan Restō notes, while this midrash is probably completely legendary, it does give us a hint of Arabian ethnography, or what the views of the 5th/6th century redactors of this text were regarding Arabian ethnography at the time. See also the *Targum Shir ha-Shirim* commenting on Song of Songs 1:5 (“I am...”

When the people of the House of Israel made the Calf, their faces became black like the sons of Kush who dwell in the tents of Qedar.

The Qedar was a Black Arab tribe, the most powerful Arab tribe of Syria and North Arabia who fought the Assyrians in the 7th century BCE. Here they are identified with Kush. They were not active at the time of Rabbi Akiba’s 5th/6th century CE redactors, but apparently their black memory was still alive and was transferred to the contemporary Black Arabs of the time. As Restō points out:

The blackness of the Arabian king is due to his dwelling in the land of the Qedar whose inhabitants are black, according to the Song of Songs...Rabbi Aqiba’s Arabia is thus identical with that of Qedar, which was the area between Egypt and Palestine.

Thus, in the century or so prior to the rise of Prophet Mu ammad in Mecca, the Arabs were still known to be Black. It should be recalled that it is this very area – between Egypt and Palestine – that Diankonoff identified as the place of origin of the Semitic languages.

As late as the 19th century Black Arabs were still noted, though invasions, migrations, slavery, and miscegenation had severely

69 The verbal root *qdr* means “to be dark”. As Marvin Pope informs us, “The root *qdr* itself carries the idea of darkness.”
changed the complexion of the peninsula.\footnote{Rest\ò, \textit{Arabs in Antiquity}, 530.} Muhammad Sadiq Bey, a Turkish photographer who traveled to Medina in 1861, noted that still, while there were light-skinned, almost white Medinese, the people were basically of “a dark, almost black complexion.”\footnote{Quoted in interview by Jeff Mortimer, “Language of the Desert,” \textit{Michigan Today}, Spring 1997 online version: http://www.ns.unich.edu/MT/97/Spr97/mta897.html accessed July 30, 2009.} So too did John Lewis Burckhardt, Swiss traveler and Orientalist, describe in his \textit{Travels in Arabia} Arabs whom he encountered as “very tall men, and almost black.”\footnote{George Mendenhall, “Arabic in Semitic Linguistic History,” \textit{JASOS} 26 (2006): 22-3.} When adventurer and anthropologist Austin Henry Layard encountered in Hebron an Arab sheikh he noted that his complexion was “scarcely less dark than a negro.”\footnote{Jan Rest\ò, in his discussion of the etymology of the term ‘Arab’ did not consider this possible Common Semitic etymology: “The Earliest Arabs,” \textit{Orientalia Suecana} 38-39 (1989-1990): 131-139; idem, \textit{Arabs in Antiquity}, 105-113.}

The original blackness of the Arabs is further supported by etymology. J.A. Loader argued in 1971 that the common Semitic root –r-b (from which we get the Arabic term ‘arab) meant primarily ‘darkness’ and wondered whether the Arabic \textit{al arab}, “The Arabs”, really meant ‘the dark people.’\footnote{Quoted in Samuel Marinus Zwemer, \textit{Arabia: The cradle of Islam: studies in the geography, people, and politics of the peninsula, with an account of Islam and mission-work} (Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1912 [ Revised edition]) 240. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century Semitists pretty much identified Arabic with Proto-Semitic. This is due to Arabic’s extremely conservative evolution. Thus, Hitti (\textit{Arab}, 8) suggested: “(The Arab’s) language, though the youngest among the Semitic group from the point of view of literature, has, nevertheless, preserved more of the peculiarities of the mother Semitic tongue-including the inflection-than the Hebrew and its other sister languages. It therefore affords us the best key for the study of the Semitic languages.” This position, while not to be abandoned, must be modified by recent data. Arabic is indeed most conservative in terms of phonetics and derived models: it is said to preserve almost the complete original phonetic set of South Arabian and Ugatitic. Thus, for the most complete catalogue possible of the Proto-Semitic lexicon one should start with the Arabic dictionary. In terms of semantic history, however, Arabic is quite innovative due to the great geographic extent travelled and cultures absorbed during the period of the Islamic empire. See del Olmo Lete, \textit{Questions of Semantic Linguistics}, 114-115; Federico Corriente, “The Phonemic System of Semitic from the Advantage of Arabic and its Dialectology,” \textit{Aula Orientalis} 23 (2005) 187-194; idem, “On the Degree of Kinship Between Arabic and Northwest Semitic,” \textit{AIDA 5 Proceedings Cádiz} (2003): 187-194.} Loader had a hard time rectifying Semitic etymology with his very limited knowledge of Arabian ethnology, speculating: “But all Arabs are and were not of a conspicuously dark complexion, and therefore this explanation does not seem an attractive one…In any case the word is ‘dark’.”\footnote{The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman et al, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 4:815 s.v. Midian by George E. Mendenhall.} But now we know that the original Arabs were dark, so Loader’s etymological insight has been confirmed.\footnote{On which see Berry, \textit{Unknown Arabs}, Chapter 10; Reynolds, “African Heritage,” 93-99.}

It is these Black Arabs, descendents of the original Kushite Afrabians, who are the original speakers of the Arabic language. University of Michigan Professor Emeritus George Mendenhall, one of the world’s leading authorities on the Near East and Near Eastern languages, notes that “Arabic could not be a gift of the prophet Mu ammad, as many Islamic clerics claim, since its origins are in the early Bronze Age,” over 3,000 years before Mu ammad.\footnote{George Mendenhall, “Arabic in Semitic Linguistic History,” \textit{JASOS} 26 (2006): 22-3.} Observing that the earliest segments of biblical Hebrew as a rule exhibit the highest percentage of Arabic cognates,\footnote{Quoted in Samuel Marinus Zwemer, \textit{Arabia: The cradle of Islam: studies in the geography, people, and politics of the peninsula, with an account of Islam and mission-work} (Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1912 [ Revised edition]) 240.} Mendenhall affirms that the further back we go, the closer Hebrew is to Arabic, thus strengthening De Goeje’s opinion that “of all Semitic languages the Arabic approaches nearest to the original mother tongue.”\footnote{Austin Henry Layard, \textit{Early Adventures in Persia, Susiana and Babylonia: including a Residence Among the Bakhtiyari and Other Wild Tribes Before the Discovery of Nineveh} 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1887) I:32.} Mendenhall has identified the “earliest identifiable Arabic-speaking social group” as the Midianites, an important political entity that came into existence suddenly in the 13th century BCE in northwest Arabia. This highly sophisticated culture spoke a language which is an archaic ancestor of modern Arabic.\footnote{This is significant because, as David Goldenberg affirms: “Kush is the ancient name of Midian.”\footnote{Or, the people of Northwest Arabia (Midian) were called Kushites.” Goldenberg, \textit{Curse of Ham}, 54.} These Midianites, the earliest identifiable Arabicspeaking social group, are documented as a Kushite or Black Arabian tribe.\footnote{The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman et al, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 4:815 s.v. Midian by George E. Mendenhall.}}
“The Arabs are basically an AD people. There is no BC activity of consequence that can be attributed to them.”
Dr. John Henrik Clarke, *The Rise of Islam in Africa*.

I. Lost Civilizations

It was popular among 19th-century antiquarians to argue that there existed in remote antiquity a “widespread” civilization of Blacks extending over Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the known world. These speculations were based largely on the observations of European adventurers who, in their world travels, discovered Black peoples everywhere an indigenous population. The seat of this ancient Black civilization, they

Sir Harry H. Johnston (1858-1927) thus noted:

To this day dwarf Negro people survive in the Far East-the Samang in the forest of the Malay Peninsula and the Acta in the Philippines. There are traces of the passage of a Negroid people through Sumatra and Borneo, in the island of Timor, and markedly in New Guinea...The existing population of Solomon Islands, of New Ireland, and of the New Hebrides, are much more Negro-Like in physical characteristics; in fact, most akin to the African Negroes of all the Asiatic or Australasian peoples. Asiatic Negroes also seem to have entered Australia from New Guinea and to have passed down to the eastern part of that continent till they reached the then peninsula of Tasmania...There is a Negroid (Melanesian) element in the Fiji, and as far west as the Hawaii Archipelago and among the Maoris of New Zealand; in much less degree also in Burma, Annam, Hainan, Formosa, the Riu-Kiu Islands, and Southern Japan...” (*The Negro in the New World*, 1910; re-printed 1969: New York, Johnson Reprint Corporation), 25f.

See also Percy Sykes who wrote *History of Persia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 51:

Some years ago during the course of my travels, I was puzzled by the extremely dark populations of Baskakird and Sarhad, very remote and mountainous regions bordering on Persia Baluchistan. The solution may be that the whole country was originally peopled by Negritos...who probably stretched along the northern shores of the Persian Gulf to India and that their descendants have survived in those distant parts.

speculated, was in Asia, either in India or on the Arabian Peninsula. John D. Baldwin, member of the American Oriental Society, argued for example:

Arabia, in very remote antiquity, was the seat of a brilliant civilization, which extended itself throughout Southwestern Asia, and spread its influence from the extreme east to the extreme west of the known world. The wonderful people of ancient Arabia—the revered and mysterious Ethiopians of ancient tradition—seem to have filled the world, as they knew it, with their commercial activity, their maritime enterprise, their colonies, and the light of their civilized life. Their traces are still found everywhere...The original country of the Cushite race—the original home where this culture had birth, and from which the Cushite colonies and influence went forth in every direction to spread civilization, and create such nations as Egypt and Chaldea...was the whole Arabian peninsula...We consider Egypt and Chaldea very old, but the culture and political organization of the Arabian Cushites were much older.

That ancient Black Arabia was the seat of a civilization that rivaled that of Egypt and Mesopotamia was argued as well by African American historian Drusilla D. Houston, who argued in her *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire*:

To the Cushite race belonged the oldest and purest Arabian blood. They were the original Arabians and the creators of the ancient civilization, evidences of which may be seen in the stupendous ruins in every part of the country. At the time that Ethiopians began to show power as monarchs of Egypt about 3000 to 3500 B.C. the western part of Arabia was divided into two powerful kingdoms. In those days the princes of Arabia

belonged wholly to the descendants of Cushites, who ruled Yemen for thousands of years...3000 to 3500 B.C. Arabian civilization equaled that of Egypt and Babylon.

As noted above Muslim tradition acknowledges twelve original tribes of ancient Afrabia. Ādand, later, Thamūdare known from the Qur ān as the early civilizations of Afrabiawho, having become proud and wicked, were destroyed. According to a number of scholars the Adites were an empire of Kushites who ruled the whole of Arabia and the Middle East. Wifred H. Schoff notes that “(The Plain of Dhofar in Southeastern Arabia), with its ancient capital, Saphar, was the center of the ancient Cushite empire (or Adite, from Ad, grandson of Ham) which included most of Southern Arabia and much of East Africa”. It has been suggested that Ād originated around eight to ten thousand years ago in the “proto-Semitic homeland,” that area in the north of the Arabian Peninsula (from northern Egypt to Syria).
Conceiving Arabia as the seat of ancient civilizations that rivaled the great civilizations which sprung up around the Nile and the Tigris and Euphrates is difficult, no doubt due to the ‘tyranny of the desert’. Measuring 650,000 square kilometers (250,000 sq mi), the Rub al-Khali (Empty Quarter; Figure 10), Arabia’s sea of sand, is the largest sand mass on earth. Its dominant position in terms of Arabia’s modern geomorphic situation makes it difficult to imagine the peninsula as a once home of high civilizations. Desertification, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon for the peninsula. Formerly a ‘tropical savanna’, hyperaridity began in the area around 20,000 years ago and desiccation around 6000 years ago.92 Before the onset of the deserts the Empty Quarter was a fertile plateau, through which large streams carved deep and wide wadys.93 There were then high civilizations on the peninsula. The remains of some of them are literally buried under this great desert. This has been confirmed by a team of archaeologists, explorers and NASA scientists who discovered in 1992 the remains of the fabled ancient city Ubar/Iram under the sands of the Rub al-Khali.94

Figure 10 Rub al-Khali (Empty Quarter)

Ubar, called in the Qur ān Iram dhā’t al- ‘Imād, “Iram of the Pillars” (89:67) was a famed, fabulously wealthy trading center from around 3000 BCE – 200 CE in the area known today as the Empty Quarter (Rub al-Khali).95 The people of Ubar were, according to tradition, a “tribe of blacks”, the tribe of ‘Ad, whose remnants today are the Shahra and Mahra tribes.96 Some time between 300 and 500 CE Ubar was suddenly destroyed. According to Muslim tradition Ubar/Iram was built by Shaddād, the son of Ād as an ‘imitation of Paradise’ and was destroyed by a catastrophic punishment from God. It was lost to modern history and, thus, modern historians deemed it merely a fable because there was no trace of this ‘lost city.’ Lawrence of Arabia called it the “Atlantis of the sands.” This all changed in 1992. NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory remote sensing satellites and ground penetrating radar, guided by photographs taken by Challenger Space shuttle in 1984, discovered remains of this lost city buried under the sands of the Empty Quarter in the Dhofar region of Southern Oman. The discovered ruins consist of octagonal walls with niches for eight pillars standing 30 feet high. The evidence indicates that its fate was indeed catastrophic: the city fell into a sinkhole created when an underground limestone crater collapsed. The city became buried under sand. Nicholas Clapp, originator of the exploration project that led to Ubar’s/Iram’s discovery, explains:

The legend of Ubar climaxed as the city ‘sank into the sands.’ It certainly did. Ubar wasn’t burned and sacked, decimated by plague, or rocked by a deadly quake. It collapsed into an underground cavern. Of all the sites in all the ancient world, Ubar came to a unique and peculiar end, an end identical in legend and reality…

At the outset of our search for Ubar, we scarcely imagined that we would find a reality that with a fair degree of accuracy validated the city’s myth, but...it seemed we had. Whether by divine vengeance or the random happenstance of nature, Ubar came to an awful end…Strata and shards and carbon-14 dating have…given a new reality to the preaching of the prophet Muhammad.97

Figure 12 Reconstruction of Ubar based on discovered ruins
Figure 13 Reconstruction of Ubar Sinkhole

That the people of Ubar were a Black people as claimed by tradition is supported by archeological evidence. Rock-art from the Rub al-Khali dated to the 4th–2nd millennia BCE depict, according to renowned archeologist and Near Eastern ethnologist Emmanuel Anati, a “Cushite” or Black population of “oval-heads” who were a “beautifully built people of high stature, with elegant body features, slender and longs legs and harmonious shapes and movements.”98

The discovery of the Ubar/Iram ruins under the sands of the Rub al-Khali should caution us against succumbing to the ‘tyranny of the desert,’ assuming that Arabia’s current climate and geomorphic reality mitigates against the peninsula having played an important role in ancient civilizational experimentations. Nor are the Ubar/Iram ruins the only material evidence of civilization on the peninsula.99 There were fortified towns in southwest Arabia, the other side of the peninsula, at the latest by...
In short, J. R. Wellsted’s claim that “Arabia was among the first nations which felt the effects of civilization; and...it was here that the first large societies of men united themselves for mutual protection” cannot be dismissed.


Based on a study of “mythologies, the ruins (archeology), the discoveries of linguistic science, and the general voice of tradition,” John Baldwin concluded that “the original Ethiopia was not in Africa (but) the original home of the Cushites or Ethiopians, the starting point of their great colonizing and civilizing movements, was Arabia.”

The Ethiopia or ‘Kush’ of Hebrew tradition is more geographically delimited: it is Arabia. As Charles Foster clarifies in his Historical Geography of Arabia: It is a matter of fact, familiar to the learned reader, that the names ‘Ethiopia’ and ‘Ethiopians’ are frequently substituted in our English version of the Old Testament where the Hebrew preserved the proper name ‘Cush.’ And the name ‘Cush’, when so applied in Scripture, belongs uniformly, not to the African, but to the Asiatic Ethiopia, or Arabia.

The biblical Table of Nations, particularly Gen. 10:7 describing the distribution of the sons of Kush, narrates an Arabian, not a continental African, genealogy, and according to Fred V. Winnett these biblical Arabian genealogies “contain information of considerable value for the reconstruction of early Arabian history.” He assumes these genealogies reflect the political and tribal situation in 6th century BCE Arabia.

These were the Cushites, black-skinned peoples (Jer 13:23). Indeed, Kushites were the dominant ethnic group in Syria-Palestine in late 8th and 7th centuries BCE.
BCE. Even Arabic tradition records an Arabian Kush. Ibn al-Mujāhir in his Tūrīkh al-mustab ī records a tradition according to which the southern Tihāma (from Mecca southwards) was called Kush.113

The oldest Sanskrit geographical writings, such as the Puranas, describe Arabia as Kūshra-duipa, Land of Kush, one of seven main ‘peninsulas’ or lands (Sapta-duipa).114 Kūshra-duipa extends from the shores of the Mediterranean and the mouth of the Nile to Sirhind on the borders of India, i.e. the Arabian Peninsula (including Syria from the mouths of the Nile, Armenia, Tigris-Euphrates countries) and the region north of the Persian Gulf. In Broken: Memorial Essays for Gusta W. Alström (JSOTSupp 190; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 45-70.

111 Anderson, “Zephaniah ben Cushi,” 68. But Anderson wants to connect these Syrian Kushites with the Nubian rulers of Egypt’s 25th Dynasty who had some influence in the area. On the other hand Robert D. Haak has shown that this association is untenable. “‘Cush’ in Zephaniah,” in Holloway and Handy, Picture is Broken, 238-251. On Kushites in the area see also Israel Eph’al, The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent 9th – 5th Centuries B.C. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982) 78-79.

112 Williams Foxwell Albright, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1956) 205 n. 49. On the Kushite presence in North Arabia see also Goldenberg, Curse of Ham, 20: “The existence of a Kushite people in the general area and references to it in the Bible have become well accepted in biblical scholarship.” 11383 [Eng. 109]

113 According to the oldest tradition found in Vayuand Bramanda Puranastra Sapta-duipa are:
1. Jambu-duipa – center
2. Anga-duipa – Northeastern Asia
3. Yama-duipa – Ancient Chinese Empire
4. Yamala-duipa – Southeastern Asian islands
5. Sancha-duipa – Africa
6. Kūshra-duipa – Arabian Peninsula
7. Varach-duipa – Europe

other words: Afrabiais Kūshra-duipa. In a later division found in Chapter IV, Book I of Vishnu Purana, six sub-duipas are added, including a second Kūshra-duipa designated Kūshra-duipa exterior and contrasted with the original Kūshra-duipa, now called Kūshra-duipa interior. The second or exterior Kūshra-Duipa is located in Sancha-duipa, i.e. Africa, beyond the straits of Bab-el Mandeb (Upper Egypt). As Capt. Francis Wilford explained: Kūshra-duipa without is Abyssinia and Ethiopia, and the Brahmens account plausibly enough for its name, by asserting that the descendents of Cushi, being obliged to leave their native country, from them called Cushi-dwipa within, migrated into Sanc’ha’-dwip, and gave their new settlement the name of their ancestor (Cusha).115

Baldwin further notes: “All accounts agree in stating that this African Cushi-duipa was created by emigration from Arabia and from countries connected with it…” 116 Thus, the Hebrews, Indo-Aryans, and Greeks (?) concurred in describing the same region as the primary Ethiopia/Kush: the Arabian peninsula, confirming Dana Marniche’s observation: “as much as Arabia was an extension of Ethiopia, Ethiopia was considered Arabia.” 117

115 “On Egypt and Other Countries Adjacent to the Cali River or Nile of Ethiopia from the Ancient Books of the Hindus,” Asianist Researches3 (1896): 55 [art. 46-265]. See also François Lenormant, The Book of Genesis (Longmans, 1886) 77: “In the Puranas Cushi-duipa, the Land of Cushi, includes Arabia and other countries between the borders of India to the Mediterranean, while at a late period a second Cushi-duipa, situated beyond the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb in Africa, was called Cushi-duipa without, as having been colonized from Cushi-dwipawan.”

116 Baldwin, Pre-Historic Nations, 65.


Figure 14

The Several ‘Kush’s’ of antiquity

III. Afrabia as Vagina Gentium

Sir E.A. Wallis Budge, Egyptologist as well as Assyriologist, noted in The Gods of the Egyptians:

It is surprising…to find so much similarity existing between the primeval gods of Sumer and those of Egypt, especially as the resemblance cannot be the result of borrowing…and we are therefore driven to the conclusion that both the Sumerians and the early Egyptians derived their primeval gods from some common but exceedingly ancient source.118

The remarkable similarity between Sumerian/Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations has been frequently noted.119 Highlighting the contemporary and similarly exceptionally fine quality of Ubaid (Sumerian) pottery and Badarian (Egyptian) pottery Michael Rice points out:


This phenomenon, so unlikely in any event and doubly so with two apparently quite disparate peoples living relatively far from each other, is one of the most puzzling of the early, more or less simultaneous, developments of Egypt and Sumer… The apparently common factors which manifest themselves in Egypt and Sumer…are too many not to warrant some speculation about the possibility of their common, or at least related, origin. 120

Equally remarkable are the parallels between Egypt and India. As Geeti Sen points out: “Neither historical events nor crosscultural currents can explain the unique parallels in the myths and imagery of ancient Egypt and India.” 121 Paul William
Roberts opined that India and Egypt, as well as Babylon and Israel, were inheritors of the legacy of a lost civilization. There must have been one. There are too many similarities between hieroglyphic texts and Vedic ones, these in turn echoed in somewhat diluted form and a confused fashion by the authors of Babylonian texts and the Old Testament.122

Rice suggests that the common culture from which the Sumerians and Egyptians evolved was Arabian.123 The Sumerians, those peoples who built the marvelous civilization by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, were akin to the Dravidians, judging from the skeletal remains as well as linguistics.124 We now know that these Sumerians originated in Arabia, as was early suspected.125 The Sumerians point to Dilmun, the “archetypal Holy Land,” as their place of origin.126 This land is Eastern Arabia generally and (later) Bahrain in particular.127 As P.V. Glob and T.G. Bibly state: Bahrain has proved to be the legendary Dilmun referred to in the cuneiform texts of Sumer, the bridge between that primary seat of urban revolution and the civilization of the Indus Valley in what is now Pakistan.128


Kushite empire.130 The eventual dessication of the Arabian peninsula likely pushed these Arabian Kushites northward in search of a wetter environment. As Michael Rice explains:

In the sixth and fifth millennia BC, and perhaps from much earlier still, there was, all the evidence now suggests, a significant population in eastern Arabia and particularly in the southeastern quadrant of the peninsula...It has been suggested that the people of this region were ancestral to the people who made Ubaid pottery...they in turn, were probably ancestral to the Sumerians. They were in all probability well established around the periphery of the Rub al-Khali and especially in what is now northern Oman. But gradually...the climate began to deteriorate and the desert, represented in Egyptian mythology by Set, the god of confusion and Lord of the East, began to move in towards the areas which had previously been able to support a population of men and animals...the people were forced to move, some eastwards and then north, others westwards along the edges of the drying lakes. These would reach the Red Sea: then the journey to Egypt would once more face the people of south-east Arabia as it had perhaps already faced some who had gone on the long sea route.132

We will discuss the westward, Nile-bound migrants below. These northward moving Arabians-turned-Sumerians brought with them a relatively high civilization. George A. Barton describes: On the Barbar temples see below. 131 Henry Field, “The Ancient and Modern Inhabitants of Arabia,” Open Court46 (1932): 851-852: “Palaeolithic and Neolithic man inhabited North Arabia, while the climate was genial and the region well-watered. Some time before the historic period, the climate had changed to a marked degree and the inhabitants were forced to become nomads...or to migrate to water. Those who chose the latter course moved eastwards to the water and encamped beside the banks of the cool and refreshing Euphrates River. They were thus the first inhabitants of Mesopotamia.” 132 Rice, Egypt’s Making, 256.

Certainly as early as 3,500 B.C. and perhaps as early as 4000 B.C., the Sumerians, pushing up the Persian Gulf from the
south, made their way into Southern Babylonia...The memory of their coming is reflected in the myth of Oannes, recounted to us by Berossos, who taught men how to construct houses, till the earth, compile laws, and all other useful knowledge. It is clear that the Sumerians were highly civilized when they entered Babylonia; they knew the arts of agriculture by 3500 B.C.; they could make beautiful objects of gold and silver, surpassing in craftsmanship and beauty anything found in Egypt until centuries later; they could write; they had invented the principle of the real arch and dome; and they had invented the use of the wheel and had chariots.133

Carleton Coon suggested that, with the post-glacial desiccation of the Near East, Arabia served as a “vagina gentium (‘womb of nations’), sending forth into other regions great numbers of inhabitants whom it could no longer support.”134 The Sumerians were such migrants from the Arabian interior, and the grandeur of the civilization that they established by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers witnesses to the level of skill and civilization that existed among the Arabian Kushites in remote antiquity, confirming the above conclusions of Baldwin and Houston. Of particular importance for this discussion is the fact that Sumerian religion derives from that of the Arabian Kushites.135

IV. Afrabia as Ta-Neter

We have seen that the evidence for Sumer/Mesopotamia evolving from an Arabian Kushite culture is significant, but Egypt too? R. Sayce and R. Peterson are sure that at least a portion of the Egyptian population originated in Arabia:

134 Carleton Coon, The Races of Europe (1939), 401.
135 Langdon, Semitic Religion, 3-4.

Ancient Egyptian tradition pointed to ‘the divine land’ of Arabia Felix as that from which their principle deities had migrated...The ‘divine land’ was Southern Arabia...Botany...supports the tradition which brought the non-animistic divinities of Egypt from Arabia Felix.136

Sayce and Peterson’s view is based on their identification of the fabled ‘Punt’ or ‘Ta Neter’, ‘Divine Land’, from which some Egyptian texts say the Gods and an ancestral race derived, as referring to Arabia.137 Rice too has proffered interesting arguments for identifying the Divine Land, at least as described allusively in the Pyramid Texts and the inscriptions of the Horus Temple at Edfu, with Bahrain, Sumer’s very own ‘Divine Land’ in eastern Arabia.138

The going opinion in late nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarship, due in large measure to the discussion by H. Brugsch,139 was that the Egyptians’ ‘Punt’ was located within southern Arabia. The tide turned, however, with the publication of R. Herzog’s German monograph in 1968, Punt (Glückstadt: Augustin). Based on a study of the flora and fauna associated with Punt, Herzog placed it in Africa, in the region of the Upper Nile between Atbara and the confluence of the White and Blue Niles. The ‘African hypothesis’ was solidified in scholarly opinion, for the most part, by K.A. Kitchen, who argued extensively for a location in the area stretching from the Red Sea to the Nile, around the latitudes of Port Sudan and Massawa.140

137 W.M. Flinders Petrie, Making of Egypt notes that Punt was “sacred to the Egyptians as the source of their race.” E.A. Wallis Budge, Short History of the Egyptian People (London: Dent, 1914) 10 says also: “Egyptian tradition of the Dynastic period held that the aboriginal home of the Egyptians was Punt.”
138 Michael Rice, “The island on the edge of the world,” in Al Khalifa and Rice, Bahrian, 116-124; idem, Egypt’s Making, 242-263.
139 Die Geographie des alten Ägyptens, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1857-1860) I:48-49, II:15-16, III:63-64. This is not to say that there was unanimity. A. Mariette demurred, arguing for an identification with Somalia: Les Listes géographiques des pylons de Karnak comprenant la Palestine, l’Ethiopie, le pays de Somal (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1875) 60-66.

Both the South Arabian and the East African theories have strengths and weaknesses and, in the end, fail to do justice to the entirety of the relevant material. Firstly, as both Johannes Dümichen and Edouard Naville pointed out, the evidence indicates that Punt clearly existed on both sides of the Red Sea.141 Arguing for an exclusive location in south-eastern Africa or south-western Arabia falls victim to the ‘tyranny of the Sea.’ Rodolfo Fattovich’s researches are important here. He has demonstrated the existence of an Afro-Arabian exchange circuit between peoples of the Horn of Africa, including the EthioSudanese lowlands, and Southern Arabia starting in the 7th millennium BCE and firmly established by the 3rd – 2nd millennium BCE.142 This circuit corresponds with the “PuntiteEgyptian” trade circuit outlined in some of the sources. Fattovich thus argues that “On the whole, the archaeological evidence from the Horn and Southern Arabia is quite consistent with the general picture of Put we can infer from the Egyptian sources.”143 That is to say, Punt/Ta-Neter included both East Africa and South Arabia. It is known that the highlands of the Ethiopian and Yemeni (South Arabian) regions form part of a wider region with very close geographical, climatic, zoological, botanical, and ethnological connections and Christopher Edens


Herzog and Kitchen’s African theses are based on a very limited selection of the relevant material. Dimitri Meeks, Director of Research at the French Institute of Egyptology, is author of the most recent and most thorough look at the subject. Drawing on the full breadth of the source material Meeks concluded:

Punt, we are told by the Egyptians, is situated – in relation to the Nile Valley – both to the north, in contact with the countries of the Near East of the Mediterranean area and also to the east or south-east, while its furthest borders are far away to the south. Only the Arabian Peninsula satisfies all these indications...The hypothesis of an African location for the land of Punt is based on extremely fragile grounds. It is contradicted by numerous texts and has become an established fact in Egyptology because no one has taken into account the full range of evidence on the subject regardless of place of origin or date. When all the evidence is assembled, the incoherent and implausible character of such an African hypothesis becomes self-evident. The only way to reconcile all the data is to locate Punt in the Arabian Peninsula.

But this is an Arabian Peninsula that stretches westward across the Red Sea. As David M. Goldenberg documents:

Today we see the Red Sea separating two distinct lands, Africa and Arabia. But in antiquity it was not seen that way. Indeed, in the world of classical antiquity, from Herodotus to Strabo, the term Arabia included the area across the Red Sea up until the Nile. It wasn’t the Red Sea but the Nile that constituted the border between Africa and Asia...These Greek and Roman...sources point to the same phenomenon as do the ancient Near Eastern sources – that the Red Sea did not serve as an ethnic boundary and land on both its sides shared the same name, whether that name was Arabia in the Greek sources or Kush in the Bible.

Figure 15

*Afribia/Kusha-Dwipa/Ta-Neter (Punt) according to ancient Egyptian, Sanskrit and Greek sources*

Identifying ‘Punt’ with the whole of the Arabian Peninsula including that portion on the African side of the Red Sea, rather than with just the south of the peninsula, is consistent with the meaning of *Ta-Neter*, ‘God’s Land.’ As Abdel-Aziz Saleh has pointed out, the term covers a region of vast extent and means generally ‘the Orient,’ i.e., east of Egypt, north-east as well as south-east. It is a synonym of and replaced the earlier Egyptian term *Akhit*, which meant “the far east.”


As Punt was “sacred to the Egyptians as the source of their race,” at least some of their race, we are not surprised to discover that Arabian Kushites constituted some of the Pre-Dynastic population. This is not to revive that long-dead theory of the invasion of a so-called ‘Dynastic Race’ from the east; this is now rightly rejected as there is no evidence of a military invasion into Egypt in the late pre-dynastic period. It is also evident that the majority of the Egyptian population had a southern African origin. There is, however, significant genetic and archaeological evidence of migrations into the Nile Valley early in the pre-historic period from Western Asia (*Afribia*).

**IV.1. The Arabian Kushite (Semitic) Contribution to Egyptian Origins**

George Steindorff and Keith C. Seele offered this reconstruction of Egyptian origins in 1957:

By approximately 6000 B.C. Egypt acquired much the same geographical countenance which it now exhibits. Its inhabitants, to judge by their language, had developed from at least two different strains...It is probable that Nilotic peoples poured in from the south, while from the east, by way of the Sinitic peninsula or across the Red Sea, came Semitic tribesmen with their gift of agriculture. In the course of a few centuries these diverse elements became mingled until their original identity...
was wholly lost. The result was a new race—the Egyptians—who were destined to give birth to the culture of the historical period.\textsuperscript{154}

It is such a historical reconstruction that the Africentrist luminary Yosef A.A. ben-Jochannan fulminated against in his important work, \textit{The Black Man’s North and East Africa}(1971), arguing instead:

the first of the foreign invaders from Asia – the Hyksos – arrived in northern Kµmit (Egypt) as conquerors. Before this period in mankind’s history, approximately c. 1675 B.C.E.…there is no evidence suggestive of any major migration of so-called ‘Semitic Peoples’ from Asia moving into North or East Africa.\textsuperscript{155}

Ben-Jochannan was loath to admit any significant ‘Semitic’ contribution to the origins of Nile Valley civilization.\textsuperscript{156} Understandably so: he, like most writers on the subject in his day, took West Asian Semites to be a white ethnic group, and therefore the claim that Nile Valley civilization is indebted to a ‘civilizing invasion’ of white Semites from the east was but another version of the racist ‘White Man’s Burden’ ideology.\textsuperscript{157} Current data, however, forces a reconsideration of the whole question, with Steindorff and Seele’s \textit{basic} reconstruction vindicated but with critical modifications. For starters, the Semitic peoples of antiquity, we now know, were a Black group/groups. Semiticism undoubtedly evolved among African


\textsuperscript{156}Ben-Jochannan and Simmonds, \textit{Black Man’s North and East Africa}, passim; Dr. Yosef A.A. ben-Jochannan, \textit{Africa: Mother of Western Civilization}(Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1988) 253, 273, 321, 350.

\textsuperscript{157}Ben-Jochannan and Simmonds, \textit{Black Man’s North and East Africa}, xi-xii, 1, 3; ben-Jochannan, \textit{Africa}, 350.

migrants to the Levant.\textsuperscript{158}Ben-Jochannan is therefore right to reject the myth of a White Semitic North Africa in antiquity, but his (and his targets’) equation of Semites with Caucasians is anachronistic.

Ben-Jochannan is also right to reject the myth of an early foreign invasion that stimulated Nile Valley civilization.\textsuperscript{159} As noted above, no such invasion can be documented for Egypt’s late Pre-Dynastic period. However, military invasion is not the only way to account for a Semitic presence in the area before the unification, and a Semitic presence, a \textit{Black Semitic} presence (at least an \textit{Afrabian} presence), is now indisputable. Even S.O.Y. Keita, in a number of meticulous studies, found that:

The peopling of what is now the Egyptian Nile Valley, judging from archaeological and biological data, was apparently the result of a complex interaction between coastal northern Africans, ‘neolithic’ Saharans, Nilotic hunters, and riverine proto-Nubians with some influence and migration from the Levant. The major variability of early ‘Egyptians’ is thus seen to have been mainly established in the \textit{proto-predynastic period} by the settling of all these peoples.\textsuperscript{160}

Keita notes that archaeology and historical sources attest to the “real presence” of Levantines/Middle Easterners in Predynastic Egypt.\textsuperscript{161} Similarly Michael Rice accepts that “the founder population which formed the basis of the historic Egyptian community was the product of migrations of peoples seeking more amenable conditions after the deterioration of the climates of the North African littoral and the increasing aridity of

\textsuperscript{158}See above.

\textsuperscript{159}Ben-Jochannan, \textit{Africa}, 253.

\textsuperscript{160}Keita, “Further Studies,” 251; idem., “Studies of Ancient Crania,” 36.


the Arabian desert.”\textsuperscript{162} Cultural items suggest a connection between the Levant, that “Proto-Semitic homeland,” and North Africa ca. 7000-6500 BP,\textsuperscript{163} and Toby Wilkinson has demonstrated that ‘Asiatics’, peoples from the Levant, were resident in Egypt in the 4\textsuperscript{th} millennium.\textsuperscript{164} Flint tools and subterranean housing from Maadi and distinctive pottery from Buto all point to a resident (Black) Asiatic community from the Levant in Lower Egypt.

Paleoanthropological evidence indicates that \textit{ca} 50-45 kya groups dispersed from the Horn of Africa region into Southern Asia and that a \textit{back}-migration into Africa from the Levant into Egypt occurred \textit{ca} 17.5-13.7 kya.\textsuperscript{165} Christy G. Turner II, archeologist from Arizona State University, likewise presents results of diachronic comparisons of dental morphology in North/East African and Near Eastern samples evincing a migration into North Africa and the Nile Valley from the Near East \textit{ca} 10,000-7,000 years ago.\textsuperscript{166} Turner and colleagues found that their was significant change in dental trait frequencies


\textsuperscript{166}Turner and colleagues, \textit{The Black Man’s North and East Africa}, 53.


between late Pleistocene (ended ca. 10,000 years ago) and Holocene (began ca. 10,000 years ago) North African populations: a more robust and complex dental morphology characteristic of West African ‘Negroids’ was followed by a simpler Near Eastern dentition similar to that of the Natufians of the Levant. It was concluded that “the only way to explain these similarities and differences was to propose significant gene flow and/or actual migration from the Southern Levant into the Nile Valley at the end of the Pleistocene and continuing into the Holocene.”

While Turner and colleagues’ studies support a significant (though not necessarily ‘massive’) pre-historic migration from the Levant into the Nile Valley, it does not – as he assumes – support a Levantine origin of the Afroasiatic language phylum. Shomarka Omar Keita of the National Human Genome Center at Howard University, has looked at these questions of migration, Predynastic enthogenesis, and Afroasiatic origins in relation to published Y chromosome data. Two Y chromosome markers studied by Keita are particularly significant: M35, which originated in eastern Africa and shows high frequencies among Afro-Asiatic speakers there (Cushitic, Egyptian, Berber) and M89, which originated in the Near East and shows high frequencies among Semitic speakers there. These distributions, according to Keita, give evidence of the Afroasiatic phylum having originated in the ‘M35’ region, from the Horn of Africa down the Nile Valley and to the Maghreb, and to the Semitic branch originating from an ancestral.

Keita’s study also gives evidence for a prehistoric backmigration into the Nile Valley from the Levant which is consistent with the dental studies of Turner and colleagues as well as the paleoanthropological evidence cited above. Of the Egyptian samples that Keita looked at, M35 was clearly the dominant marker, suggesting a biocultural affinity between the Nile Valley populations and East Africans further south. However, Keita’s Egyptian samples also showed significant M89 frequencies: in two Egyptian samples the M89 marker was the majority. This suggests migration into the Nile Valley of Near Eastern M89 bearers. More recently, Andrew Lancaster has brought together data from archaeology, comparative linguistics, and population genetics indicating that M35 bearers and Afroasiatic speakers originated around the Horn of Africa and migrated northward into the Levant, where Semitism will develop and later re-enter North Africa in the pre-historic period. Thus, these data from diverse studies all converge to indicate that a part of the prehistoric Nile Valley populations originated in Western Asia, i.e. Afrabia.

IV.1.1. The Badarians as Afrabians

This ‘Southern African’ and ‘Eastern Asiatic’ duality of the prehistoric population of Egypt is reflected already in the earliest Upper Egyptian culture of the Predynastic period, the Badarian. Keita, “Geography,” 11. Keita does not use the term ‘Semitized.’ Instead he suggests that the ancestral M35 group from Africa, upon arriving in Syria-Palestine, encountered there and was “adopted” by a M89 bearing population.

without any doubt the basic agricultural and pastoral complex of the Badaranian culture, the occurrence of the first painted pottery and the first copper, together with some important ideological conceptions (e.g. about the Great Mother or of the Procreative Power), have Middle Eastern roots…other evidence points to African origins. This cultural duality is a…parallel to the ascertainment biological duality of the population.

The Badarian culture of Middle Egypt, evidenced by around 600 ‘wealthy’ graves, was excavated in 1924-29 by the British School of Archeology in the region of El-Badari on the east bank of the Nile. Thermoluminesence tests give a date of 5000 BCE, 4000 BCE. The Badarians were a highly cultured and civilized group, “bearing witness to a complex and technologically advanced society”. Their pottery, evidence of a high level of pyrotechnology, is particularly fine, unmatched by anything produced by subsequent Egyptians. Badarian culture is especially important in that it is the Urgemeinde (”protocommunity”) out of which Dynastic Egypt eventually evolved.


Jean Leclant in Midant-Reynes, *Prehistory of Egypt*, xii.

Hendrickx and Vermeersch, “Prehistory,” 40-41; Brunton and Caton-Thompson, *Badarian Civilization*, 41.


While some early biometric studies saw a homogenous Badarian community,181 the excavators of this culture clearly noted the heterogeneity of the population.182 The community seems to have consisted of two basic types: gracile and robust.183 Most of the Badarians were short, around 5 feet tall with minimal muscular development.184 “In fact,” said anatomist Grafton Elliot Smith, “there is a suggestion of effeminate grace and frailty about his bones”.185 The Badarian bones are so effeminate, Brenda N. Stoessiger informed us, “skulls are extremely difficult to sex, being all of a frail and feminine type.”186 Their crania have, we are told, a strange blend of “Caucasoid” and “Negroid” traits.187 The skull is long and narrow (dolichocephalic), showing “no sign of the characteristic Negro broadness in the facial area.”188 Hair is wavy or straight (Euplocomic or Euthycomic), “never kinky”.189 On the other hand the nose is broad (platyrrhine) and the face is protruding in the lower jaw (prognathic), giving “a more generally Negro appearance”.190 Also, the Badarian small frame is of a “Negroid,” even “super-’Negroid’” or tropical African body plan.191 This set of characteristics clearly points to the Elongated type,192 particularly the Eastern articulation of this type. Several commentators have noted its resemblance to the Indian (Dravidian) type.193 It is thus certain that these proto-Egyptians almost identical; Keita notes that “Naqada culture primarily derived from Badari”: “Analysis of Naqada Predynastic crania,” 203. Rice, *Egypt’s Making*, notes also: “The Naqada I people were almost certainly the direct descendents of the earlier settlers and their culture really represents a more advanced phase of the Badarian (30).” See further Midant-Reynes, *Prehistory*, 170; Hassan, “Predynastic,” 159.


Keita, “Further Studies,” 250 notes: “The modal phenotype in archaic and early Old Kingdom Egyptian art seems to be Elongated African.”

Brenda N. Stoessiger noted in her 1927 craniometric study: “When we compare the Badarian race with others outside of Egypt, it is not to the Mediterranean or any Negro type which it resembles most closely but the primitive Indian, the Dravidian and the Vedda.” Stoessiger, “Study of the Badarian Crania,” 147; Brunton and Caton-Thompson, *Badarian Civilization*, 68; Petrie, *Making of Egypt*, 7; Andrzej Wierciński, “The Analysis of Racial Structure of Early Dynastic Populations in Egypt,” *Materiały i Prace Antropologiczne* 71 (1965): 3-47; A.C. Berry, “Origins and Relationships of the Ancient Egyptians. Based on a Study of Non-metrical Variations in were not the Twa or Bushmen as Sir E.A. Wallis Budge and others assumed.”194
Coexisting with this ‘gracile’ type was a more massive, rugged or robust type. Some individuals reached 6 ft tall; some were strong and muscular. While only a minority, this type may have accounted for one quarter of the Badarian population. Eugen Strouhal, in his study of 117 Badarian crania, found that 24 were of the so-called ‘pure’ gracile *Elongated type* (which he labels with the out-dated and misleading terms “Europoid” and “Mediterranean”). Ninety-four (80.3 %) were of mixed Europoid-Negroid character: thus, the ‘typical’ Badarian mix of long, narrow head on the one hand and broad nose and protruding jaw on the other. Fourteen skulls were found to be robust (6) or ‘purely’ Negroid (8), i.e. the *Broad type*.

Strouhal’s examination of a number of crania with hair produced five samples that were flattened in the cross-section (*Eriocomic, “wooly”*), showing “the Negroid influence among the Badarians.” Thus, he concludes, “the Negroid (read: *Broad type*) component among the Badarians is anthropologically well based.” Strouhal is therefore convinced that the Badarians are the “ultimate evidence” of the prehistoric biological contact the Skull.” *Journal of Human Evolution* (1972): 199-208; Drake, *Black Folk*, 1:114. On the other hand, V. Giaffrè-Ruggeri saw these Predynastic Egyptians as Ethiopians: “Were the Pe-Dynastic Egyptians Libyans or Ethiopians?” *Man* 15 (1915): 51-56; idem, “A Few Notes on the Neolithic Egyptians and the Ethiopians,” *Man* 16 (1916) 87-90.


between the Asiatic *Elongated* and African *Broad* types in the Nile Valley. On the other hand, S.O.Y. Keita sees both types as indigenous African varieties which “united very early by a developing common culture.” These two positions can be reconciled by recognizing *Afrabia*, i.e. the Arabian Peninsula’s status as the northeastern extremity of Africa.

While Keita is certainly correct in his recognition of the *Elongated* and *Broad* types as indigenous African varieties, he goes too far in his claim that “data from physical anthropology, archaeology and linguistics do not suggest a primary origin external to Africa for the early Nile Valley peoples.” This statement is certainly true for most of the historic peoples that will converge to produce the “ancient Egyptian” race; it is true for all of the peoples only if we employ the broader, more natural definition of ‘Africa’ which includes *Afrabia*. Toby Wilkinson’s measured statement is no doubt more appropriate:

Recent evidence suggests that it is time to re-appraise the extent and nature of Egypt’s early contacts with the rest of the Near East. From the Predynastic period, foreigners…seem to have settled in Egypt…It seems increasingly likely that, during the fourth and early third millennia BCE, the eastern Mediterranean in general, and the area encompassing the Nile Delta, the north Sinai and southern Palestine in particular, witnessed significant mixing of people and ideas…Foreign cultures and foreign people may, after all, have played a role in the early development of Egyptian civilization…The picture that is emerging from archaeology is not of Egypt as a civilization apart. Rather, there seems to have been a high degree of contact – both direct and indirect – between the peoples of the ancient Near East, at all periods.”

The evidence suggests that the Badarian culture consisted of Black ‘Asiatics’ and Africans. The culture’s characteristic Rippled pottery and shell fishhooks have been connected with that of the Khartoum Neolithic culture of the Sudan. This was a robust and very Negroid (*Broad*) culture, and may thus account for the robust, Negroid element among the Badarians. On the other hand, the Badarian’s Western Asiatic connection is even more substantial. L. Krzyzaniak places the ultimate origin of these turban-wearing Badarians in Southwest Asia, stressing the fact that the characteristic rippling effect on Badarian pottery was practiced ca. 4500 BCE already in Jericho, Byblos, southern Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia. The wheat, barley and flax found in Badarian settlements come from West Asia, as does no doubt the sheep, goats, first copper, and the Great Mother, all associated with this culture. As James Mellaart puts it:


On Badarian contacts with West Asia see also Sava P. Tutundjian, “The problem of foreign north-eastern relations of Upper Egypt, particularly in Badarian period: an
Neither the wild ancestors of wheat, barley, etc., nor those of sheep and goat (as against cattle and pig) are native to North Africa, and their presence in Egypt is artificial and manmade...These northern contributions show that the Egyptian development was not a completely African affair.

Similarly the Badarians worshipped the god Set, who was considered “the Lord of Asia and the lands east of Egypt”. This evidence at least partly supports the early claim that “it is to Asia, and not to Africa or Europe, that we should look for the source of the Badarician people.” This is likely the case for part of the Badarician population; some of it no doubt came from further south in Africa. It must be emphasized that what is proposed here is not a “mass migration” or “wholesale settlement colonization of the Nile Valley by a community of alien origin,” perspectives that “(deny) indigenous in situ evolution and culture to supra-Sahara and Saharan Africa” and in effect “deAfricanizes a part of Africa due to outmoded non-evolutionary theories.” The evidence clearly suggests that historic Egypt developed out of a predominantly southern African culture that absorbed a smaller north-eastern African, i.e. Afrabian culture. Archaeologist/linguist Peter Bellwood summarizes it best:

the striking fact remains that the Nile Valley cannot be demonstrated to have been settled by agriculturalists until about 5500-5000 BC, at which time a full agropastoral economy with pottery was introduced from Southwest Asia...When agriculturalists first entered the Nile Valley at about 5500 BC, other people who made pottery, collected wild sorghum, and, according to some authorities, herded cattle, had already been living at Nabta Playa and Bir Kiseiba in Egypt’s Western Desert for possibly 3000, during periodic and brief phases of wetter climate...Mid-Holocene dessication of the Sahara with retraction of the summer monsoon finally led to virtual abandonment of Nabta Playa and other oasis settlements by about 4000 BC, and this might have led to a kind of refuge movement into the Nile Valley, where Saharan people would have met and mixed with the descendants of the Southwest Asian Neolithic population responsible for the introduction of the Southwest Asian agricultural tradition into the Nile Valley about 1,500 years earlier. The resulting amalgam was later to develop into one of the most remarkable civilizations of the ancient world, a true synthesis of the Oriental and the African.

It is to be noted again that all of these actors in this historic drama were Black peoples.

VI.1.2. Afrabia and the Anu

Art historian James E. Brunson has identified the Amratian (Naqada I) culture that emerged out of the Badarician asthe historic race of the Anu. This may or may not be the case. The First Farmers, 101.

Anu, first discovered by French Egyptologist Abbe Émile Amélineau, are considered the aboriginal or ‘Old Race’ of Egypt, the “first Blacks to inhabit Egypt”. According to Amélineau the Anu were a southern race that came slowly down the Nile founding and shutting themselves within fortified cities for defensive purposes: Esneh, Erment, Qouch and Heliopolis. They were an agricultural people raising cattle on a large scale along the Nile. Significantly, to the Anu are attributed the rudiments of Egyptian civilization.

To this people we can attribute, without fear of error, the most ancient Egyptian books, The Book of the Dead and the Texts of the Pyramids, consequently, all the myths or religious teachings. I would add almost all the philosophical systems then known and still called Egyptian. They evidently knew the crafts necessary for any civilization and were familiar with the tools those trades required. They knew how to use metals, at least elementary metals. They made the earliest attempts at writing, for the whole Egyptian tradition attributes this art to Thoth, the great Hermes an Anu like Osiris, who is called Onian in Chapter...
The Book of the Dead and in the Texts of the Pyramids. Certainly the people already knew the principal arts; it left and in the depiction of the Egyptians symbolized the Egyptian male as “the blood of life” and possessor of spirit after death, qualities denied non-Egyptians who were thus portrayed in certain specific, ecological factors including the change to a characteristics…are now attributed, by some population biologists and geneticists, to the ancient adaptation of Africoids to reddish hue, which is thought, also, to be due to the ecological pressures of the environment in which they evolved…These be very slender with gracile bones and attenuated limbs. The skin, though dark-brown or black-brown, tends to have a strong looking men of Arabia and those in Africa…are often found in areas where temperatures soar above 120 degrees. They tend to undergone a specialized physical development having evolved in hot, dry regions in the late stone age. Many of the Eritrean-believe, hit on the answer with this anthropological insight:

Conquest’ is that of one Black group (Nubians) conquering another (the Anu). And according to Amélineau “The conclusion to be drawn from these considerations is that the conquered Anu people guided its conquerors at least along some of the paths to civilization and the arts.”

Whence came this ‘Old Race’ of predynastic Egypt? Amélineau thought they were Africans from the south. On the other hand, H.R. Hall suggested that the Anu were a ‘protoSemitic’ race that entered the Nile Valley from the Arabian Peninsula through the Isthmus of Suez. Drusilla Dunjee Houston likewise suggested that “The ancient inhabitants of Arabia Petrae were the ‘Anu’ of the Old Race of Egypt,” and Cheikh Anta Diop too describes “Arabia Petraea, land of the Anu, Blacks who founded Northern On (Heliopolis) in historical times.” There is evidence supporting an Arabian provenance. Pliny the Elder (d. 79 CE) noted that Heliopolis (On, the city of...
neolithic diet in combination with dwelling in exceeding hot, dry habitats. This would tend to disqualify the ‘red’ Anu as an equatorial race (i.e. Twa), and a post-desiccation Arabian habitat certainly best matches the ecological characteristics noted by Reynolds. The very name ‘Anu’ seems also to point to Arabia. James E. Brunson has documented ‘Anu’ peoples in Sumer and in India, designated with the characteristic “three pillars”’ as in Egypt. We recall that the Sumerians originated in eastern Arabia, and tell of their migration northward in the myth of the civilized fish-man, Oannes, which is related to the term Anu. This means that the Sumerian “Anu” were an East Arabian group. The further association with India is consistent with the linguistic and genetic evidence that points to the Dravidians having entered Northern India from the Middle East/Western Asia/Afrabia. We thus likely have the following situation: a group of eastern Arabs (Anu) migrated north becoming the Sumerians. Some of these continued into India. Another group travelled west into the Nile Valley. This Arabian/Indian/Egyptian nexus no doubt lies behind the fact that at various times all three shared the same names: Ethiopia, India and Arabia, each applied to all three areas interchangeably. As Philip Mayerson documents, Byzantine authors after the 4th century indiscriminately apply the name


232 Before the Unification, 5-6; Predynastic Egypt, 45.

233 Predynastic Egypt, 43.

234 Partha P Majumder, “Ethnic Populations of India as seen from an evolutionary perspective.” Journal of Bioscience 26 (2001): 541: “The northern exit route of humans from Africa to India was through the Middle East and west Asia.”

235 Dana Reynolds (now Dana Marniche) observes: “It must be said that early Greeks and Romans did not usually distinguish ethnically between the people called Saracens and the inhabitants of southern Arabia (the Yemen) which was called India Minor or Little India in those days, nor southern Arabs from the inhabitants of the Horn of Africa…Strabo, around the first century B.C., Philostratus and other writers, speak of the area east of the Nile in Africa as ‘Arabia’.” “African Heritage,” 105.

‘India’ to South Arabsians, Ethiopians, and sub-continental Indians. It is no doubt in this context as well that we are to understand and accept Grafton Elliot Smith’s observation:

The balance of probability is strongly in favour of the view that the Arabs and the Proto-Egyptians were sprung from one and the same stock, the two divisions of which living in the territories separated by the Red Sea, had become definitely specialized in structure, in customs and beliefs, long before the dawn of the period known as Predynastic in Egypt...the linguistic evidence...according to many scholars, points to a similar conclusion.

Also A. Sayce and R. Peterson: “In color (dark red), form and features (gracile) the inhabitants of Arabian Punt resembled the inhabitants of Egypt.” At least some of the inhabitants of Egypt.


238 Race in Ancient Egypt, 65.

Chapter Three

The Religion of Afrabia

I. The Neolithic and the Birth of a New Religion

In 1994 French archaeologist Jacques Cauvin published what I consider to be a profoundly important monograph, Naissance des divinités, Naissance de l’agriculture: L a Révolution des Symboles au Néolithique (“Birth of the Gods, Birth of Agriculture: The Symbolic Revolution in the Neolithic”). In it Cauvin cogently argued that the Neolithic revolution ca 10,000 BCE was preceded by a ‘revolution of symbols.’ That is to say, even before the change in subsistence strategies that defined the neolithisation of the Near East, there occurred an equally dramatic and consequential change in the collective ‘psycho-culture’ of the still hunter-gatherers of the Epipaleolithic, a change evidenced most clearly in a new symbolism as reflected in the art forms. The former symbolic art of the Epipaleolithic was primarily zoomorphic, with animals represented ‘democratically,’ if you will: no hierarchical organization is evident and no animal personality is made prominent. Thus, while selection of animals depicted may reflect a sense of ‘religious awe’ on the part of our primitive artists, no animal species stands out as an ‘animal god’ or a theriomorphic representation of ‘God.’ This all changed on the eve of the Neolithic. For some reason a new and rather coherent symbolic system, or as Cauvin calls it ‘a new religion’, emerged wherein the divine is...

"on water and cows in Indic tradition see further Anne Feldhaus, 2001) xxii, 3, 25, 29.

The role of the Woman in this ancient mythic scheme was eloquently elaborated by François Lenormant in 1874 in his *Magie chez les Chaldéens et les origines accadiennes* ("The Chaldean Magi and Akkadian Origins"). Discussing the Mesopotamian and Levantine religious tradition, or "Kushito-Semitic" tradition, Lenormant affirms that these religions "show the same fundamental ideas, and have the names of the great majority of the gods in common".

The idea of the Divine Being one, and universal, who minglest himself with the material world, which has emanated from his substance and not been created by him, is met within everywhere at the basis of belief… Cause and proto-type of the visible world, a nature-god has necessarily a double essence; he possesses the two principles of all terrestrial generation, the active and passive productive powers of the universe. Fire, the active power, was masculine and represented by a circle, while water

\[ \text{Cauvin, Birth of the Gods, 69.} \]

was the feminine passive power represented by the square or rectangle. The ancients understood that productivity resulted from the interaction of the two, the solar and the aquatic, and this interaction was hieroglyphically represented as a circle (or asterisk) within a square. This is the origin of the designation for the goddess as ‘the Place of the Gods’ or the House of God: the solar has indwelled within the aquatic. This ‘geometrical revolution’ of the Neolithic therefore, in as much as it is related to the symbolic/theological revolution, seems to have signaled a theological refocusing: from the transcendent to the immanent aspects of deity. The anthropomorphic (woman) and theriomorphic (bull) symbolism signaled the same. It is not at all clear what social, economic or cultural changes might have stimulated this psychological and, indeed, paradigm shift, but it was of profound and lasting consequence for the history of religion from that point till today. How does the Bull and the Woman of this Epipaleolithic/Neolithic ‘new religion’ signal divine immanence?

Figure 17

The Geometric/Architectural Revolution

\[ \text{Knight, Symbolic Language, 64.} \]

*The Goddess*: In the History of Religions water, that amorphous cosmic material from which life emerges, often assumes a feminine character. Thus, as Marjia Gimbutas amply demonstrates, the primary symbolism of the goddess is aquatic – water, zig-zags, M’s, aquatic birds, etc. – associating her with the cosmic waters which are her element and her sphere. As the cosmic womb of life she is depicted as a cow and black. This black goddess represents divine imminence. As Gimbutas states: “The goddess is immanent rather than transcendent and therefore physically manifest.”


\[ \text{Ibid., xix. In the g Veda the cosmic waters are cows (e.g. 4.3.11; 3.31.3; 4.1.11) and in Pañcaviśa-Brāhmaṇa 21.3.7 the spotted cow Śabaka’s addressed: “Thou art the [primeval ocean.” On water and cows in Indic tradition see further Anne Feldhaus, Water and Womanhood, Religious Meanings of Rivers in Maharashtra (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 46-47.} \]

\[ \text{Ibid., 316.} \]
goddess, in the religions of the Euphratico-Syrian [Kushito-Semitic] group is entitled the ‘manifestation’ [‘reflection’] rather of the male god to whom she corresponds. She does not differ from him essentially... Thus is Chaldea and Babylonia, as in Syria and Phoenicia, every god is necessarily accompanied by a goddess who corresponds to him. These divine personages are not imagined separately, but in couples; and each of these couples forms a complete unity, a reflection of the unity. When the god has a solar character, the goddess has a lunar nature; if the one presides over the day, the other presides over the night; if one personifies the elements regarded as active, fire, and air, the other personifies the passive elements, water and earth (emphasis mine-WM).250

Figure 18
Enthroned Goddess, flanked by felines, giving birth to child who emerges between her legs. Central Anatolia, 6000 BCE.

250Ibid., 117, 129.

The Bull: As the “fecundatorpar excellence, indeed the proto-type of male fertility,”251 the Bull is the paramount ‘attribute animal’ of the Creator God in the ancient world.252 This Divine Bull, that is to say the bull used to represent the all-powerful male creator-god, was a black bull, in particular the now extinct (sic) Bos primigenius or aurochs bull.253 Standing two meters to the shoulders, weighing upwards of a ton, with a meter-wide spread of horns, the Bos primigenius was an immense beast, a contemporary of the other megafauns: the mammoth and huge Irish elk. This bull had powerfully developed and coordinated flesh, muscle and bone, making him the paragon of power and nobility. As Michael Rice writes in his study of the ancient and wide-spread bull-cult:

The essential and distinctive elements in the bull’s status in antiquity are the recognition of his nobility as a lordly beast... and his concentrated, highly coordinated power... the


bull is the epitome of cheiftainty, hence of kingship... The bull is always portrayed in all his vigour, potency and beauty.254 The beauty of the aurochs bull has much to do with its distinctive dense black coat with a white stripe running down its spine and white curly tuft between its horns. In the ancient bull-cult this black bull-hide is associated with the black primordial waters and signals the black skin of the creator-god who emerged out of those waters and produced therefrom an earthly body.255 According to this ‘Myth of the Black God’ the creator-deity emerged from these waters as a so-called ‘sun-god,’ initially possessing a body of brilliant white or golden light, but later chose to cloak this fiery, transcendent body with a more accessible, tolerable (for his creatures) black body, made out of the matter of the primordial waters.256 It is this aquatic black body that is represented by the black bull. In geometrical terms, the ‘sun-god’

254 Ibid., 274.

255 See e.g. the black skin of the Egyptian deity Min, the ‘creator god par excellence.’ Robert A. Armour, Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 1986, 2001) 157; Veronica Ions, Egyptian Mythology, Middlesex: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd., 1968) 110. While Min was associated with a white bull in New Kingdom Panopolis and Coptos at an earlier period in Heliopolis he was associated with the black bull Mnevis. See G.D. Hornblower, “Min and His Functions,” Mantis (1946): 116 [art.=113-121]. On Min and black bovines see also H. Gauthier, Les personel du dieu Min (Le Caire, 1931; IFAO, Recherches d’Archéologie 2) 55-57. On the mythological significance of the black bovine skin see especially Vos, Various Coloribus Aapis. “On the black bovine, Creator-god, and primordial waters see Asko Parpola, ‘New correspondences between Harappan and Near Eastern glyptic art,’ South Asian Archaeology 1981, 181 who suggests that ‘the dark buffalo bathing in muddy water was conceived as the personification of the cosmic waters of chaos’. See also W.F. Albright who noted that ‘the conception of the river as mighty bull is common’: “The Mouth of the Rivers,” AJSL 35 (1991): 167 n.3 [art.=161-195]. The black bull (k” k”m) of Egypt, personified the waters of the Nile which was regarded as a type of Nu, the dark, primeval watery mass out of which creation sprang (See Emile Chassinat, “La Mise a Mort Rituelle D’Aapis,” Recueil de travaux relatifs a la philohyie et a l’archeologie egyptiennes et assyriennes 38 [1916] 33-60; E.A. Wallis Budge, The Egyptian Book of the Dead (The Papyrus of Ani), Egyptian Text Transliterated and Translated (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1967) cxxi). See also the Babylonian Enki, called am-gig-alu, ‘black bull of the Apsû (primordial waters).’ See Albright, ‘Mouth of the Rivers,’ 167. On the black bull and the black waters of creation see also Vos, “Various Coloribus Aapis,” 715, 718.

256 On this ‘Myth of the Black God’ in ancient tradition see Appendix.

with his transcendent luminous body is analogous to the circle,257 while the immanence of the rectangle is analogous to the aquatic black body, theriomorphically represented by the black bull and anthropomorphically represented by the Black Goddess. In other words, both the black bull and the black goddess represent the physical immanence of the creator-god in the
world. What then is the relation between these two symbols?

Figure 19

Reconstituted Bos primigenius

Rice noted “the curious combination of the Goddess cult…with the cult of the bull,” for which he could find no explanation.258 But I believe he hit on the explanation of this relationship when he points out that, according to the myth associated with the ancient bull-cult “The bull…is a creature of


the Mother,”259 i.e. the black body is the product of the primordial aquatic matter, symbolically personified in the Woman. In a very real sense, the ‘new religion’ was about Corpus dei, the Body of God. The Goddess is the matrix. The aquatic black body of the creator-deity derives from the primordial black waters, personified in and symbolized by the black Mother Goddess. This is why the Mother Goddess is usually depicted with the youthful male god on her lap or emerging from her womb (Figures 18 and 20).260 To fully comprehend this theme, we must disentangle the motif of the Cosmic Mother as both wife (primarily) and mother (secondarily) of the creator-god. Jack Randolph Conrad notes:

In Egyptian theology, Ra, the sun, the Bull of Heaven, reproduced himself…by copulating with his mother. He is described as the “bull of his mother, who rejoices in the cow, the husband impregnating with his phallus”…Such gods were called Kamutef, or “bull of his mother”.261

The mythic motif behind these expressions is as follows: in the form of a luminous divine man (sun-god) the creator-god emerges out of the primordial waters, the latter personified as a cow and described as his ‘mother’.262 Because the sun-god ‘went back into’ his mother, the primordial waters, to produce a new body – the black body – he is said to have ‘copulated’ with her, who is now also described as his ‘wife’. This copulation, however, produced him all over again, reborn through her but now as the immanent Black God, with a black body from the primordial

259 Rice, Power of the Bull, 102.

260 See below.

261 Horn and the Sword, 86.

262 See for example the Egyptian image of a mighty cow rising up out of the waters bearing the sun-disk between her horns. The cow is the “mother of the sun god”; Erik Hornung, Idea into Images: Essays in Ancient Egyptian Thought (Tinken Publishers, 1992) 41.

black mater. Edmund Leach, in his essay “The Mother’s Brother in Ancient Egypt,” explains this theological concept:

Total deity is conceived as a bisexual triad – God the Father, God the Son, and God the ‘Mother of God’ – but the theology insists that God is consubstantial-coeternal from the beginning, (so) the system by which God the Father ‘begets’ God the Son through the body of the Mother of God replicates itself indefinitely, so that the Mother of God is also the Spouse of God, the Sister of God, and even the Daughter of God.263

The ‘new religion’ is not a “female monotheism”264 or a “Goddess-centered religion.”265 The Goddess’s role in this myth is not as singular ‘life-creating power’ nor is the male bull-god ‘ephemeral and mortal’ in relation to her.266 As Conrad documents, “for millennia the bull-god, the father-god of strength and fertility, stood unchallenged as the supreme god of the ancient Near East.”267 The Goddess in this myth is a matrix, that prima material out of which life emerged, but the role of Creator of the cosmos is reserved for the male god, the Bull God. The goddess appears as the god’s complement and, symbolically, as the personification of the aquatic substance of the god’s earthly body. This mystery of the union of the masculine Sun God and the aquatic primordial matter, personified as the Mother Goddess, is at the heart of the ‘new religion’, as evidenced by the later mystery systems that will evolve out of it.268 This is the alchemical coniunctio oppositorum “synthesis of opposites,” the synthesis of the male element (fire, sun, right) and


264 Cauvin, Birth of the Gods, 32.

265 Gimbutas, Language, xvi.

266 Gimbutas, Language, 316, 175.

267 Conrad, Horn and the Sword, 112.

268 On which see Appendix below.

female element (water, moon, left).269 As Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty informs us:

The image of fire in water is the ultimate resolution of opposites; held in suspended union, each retains its full power and nothing is lost in the compromise, but there is complete balance.270

This is why the mythological family of Egypt was always a triunit consisting of father, mother, and boy-child.271 The mother and father represented differentiation, the young boy the unity of the two, the coniunctio oppositorum. The child is a boy because this child is the creator of the material world reborn. The ‘new religion,’ through its symbolism of Bull and Woman, is

269 Cauvin, Birth of the Gods, 32.

270 Cauvin, Birth of the Gods, 32.
focused on the male god in his imminent black body rather than in his transcendent, fiery aspect.

Figure 20
Black Madonna and Child of Einsiedeln

Black Madonna and Child of Einsiedeln


II. Ancient Cult Centers of the New Religion

This ‘new religion’ of the Bull and the Goddess seems to have originated in the (black) Levant which, as Rice reminds us, is really just an extension of Arabia, despite the modern political boundaries. While evidence of this new religion is found as far back as 10,000 BCE (e.g. aurochs skulls with horns buried in houses), we have a good amount of material evincing a cult center in the ninth millennium BCE in ‘Ain Ghazal, a Neolithic village located near present day Amman, Jordan and dated ca. 8300-6000 BCE (calibrated dates). One of the largest Neolithic villages of the ancient Near East, archaeologists have unearthed multi-roomed rectangular structures. Along with remains yielding information about diet and subsistence economy, archaeologists have found human and animal figurines, some of which hint at the religious life of the villagers. The most frequent animal figurine is the bull. Expressing ‘the numinous’, the bull figurine “conveyed force, vitality, dynamism.” In one home a stone bin containing aurochs bones and a bull figure has been found.

According to G.O. Rollefson, one of the lead excavators of ‘Ain Ghazal, this material “project(s) a strong picture of intensive attention to politico-religious ceremony and ritual.” Along with the bull figurines, a remarkable stone statuette of a pregnant woman has been recovered. Denise Schmandt-Besserat has made a strong case for interpreting this piece as a pregnant goddess, “a stone metaphor” to “express the mysteries of an immanent black body (represented by the bull) of the creator of the cosmos.

Being that genetic evidence indicates a migration from Western Asia (*Afrabia*) into Northern India in the pre-historic period, we are then not surprised to learn that in the oldest Neolithic site unearthed thus far on the subcontinent of India evidence of the cult of the Bull and Woman has been found. Mehrgarh, dated to 7000-3200 BCE, is located on what is now the Kachi plain of today’s Baluchistan, Pakistan. Four thousand years its successor, the Indus Valley civilizations undoubtedly evolved out of this early community. Evidence for the earliest practice of dentistry has been found here as the drilling of human teeth *in vivo* (i.e. in a living person) is indicated in the remains of nine adults found in the Mehrgarh population. Most importantly for our discussion, figurines have been recovered – bull and woman figurines predominating. Interestingly, we meet the motif that will only later appear in Egypt – the Mother (Goddess) with child on her lap, reminiscent of Isis and Horus. The child and the bull are no doubt two different representations of the male god born from the primordial matrix, the Mother Goddess.

Without question, the most elaborate, extensive cult center for this new religion was in Mehrgarh’s Anatolian contemporary, Çatal Hüyük (6500-5700 BCE). As Rice notes:

Çatal Hüyük represents a high point in the development of the bull-cult; so much does the worship of the bull dominate the remains of the settlement that many of the aspects of later bull worship seem to have their origin there, though they may reappear in times and places far distant from the sixth millennium on the Konya plain (Turkey)…what is certain is that, whilst the Çatal Hüyük community disappeared around 5600 BC…many of the characteristics of the bull-cult developed on the plains of Anatolia were to be reproduced in Sumer, Elam, Egypt and Crete, in some cases thousands of years after the proto-city at Çatal Hüyük was abandoned.
Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia, Turkey is a highly developed ‘protocity’ in what Marjia Gimbutas has described as ‘Old Europe,’ that Europe prior to the coming of the Indo-Europeans. ‘Old Europeans’ were a Black people. According to Bernard Vandermeersch, modern humans in Europe originated in West Asia and migrated north into Europe. West Asia was a part of the ‘Black Belt’ during this period. The human depictions on the walls at Çatal Hüyük show a decidedly dark people. It is likely that this Anatolian cult of the Bull and Woman diffused from the Levant, the black or Afrabian Levant. Çatal Hüyük was not a center of goddess worship: both the anthropomorphous male god and female goddess are depicted enthroned. It is not the case, as Cauvin and Gimbutas claim, that the male deity represented by the bull, due to his filial relationship with the goddess, is secondary or subordinate to her. Rather, at Çatal Hüyük “the bull is a paramount figure; indeed the shrines…represent a sort of cathedral consecrated to the bull” (Figure 21).

The central myth of the Çatal Hüyük cult is no doubt hinted at by an important and well known find: a clay figurine of a corpulent woman sitting on a throne flanked by two leopards (Figure 18). This figure has been interpreted as a ‘birth-giving Goddess’ sitting on a ‘birth-throne,’ an infant’s head “emerging from her ample thighs”. While not everyone shares this interpretation of the figure, it is supported by other imagery at the proto-city. On walls of a domestic sanctuary a figure is depicted, arms and legs spread, concentric circles drawing attention to the belly (Figure 22). While the figure is likely a bear or a bear-human hybrid rather than a woman as initially thought, the bear is still an ancient symbol of the mothergoddess. Underneath this bear figure are bucrania (bull heads) and the whole scene suggests that the ‘bear-goddess’ is “giving birth to bulls…whose sculpted bucrania, set below her, seem to emanate from her”. This combination of sanctuary and image of mother-goddess giving birth to the bull-god, the Black God, is vitally important. We will encounter it again in Mecca, Arabia.


A Figure 21
III. Proto-Semitic Religion and the Black God

The Proto-Semites are believed to have been the speakers of that language (Proto-Semitic) from which the various Semitic languages derived (Arabic, Hebrew, Ugaritic, Akkadian, etc.). It has been suggested that these Proto-Semites originated in the Levantine area (the northern portion of the Arabian Peninsula) and began diverging into separate ‘Semitic’ languages maybe around 5000 BCE. As these Proto-Semites will eventually evolve into the Semites (Arabs, Hebrews, Canaanites, Akkadians, etc.), Proto-Semitic religion will make an important contribution to the development of the Semitic religious tradition, even the Semitic monotheistic traditions (i.e. the so-called ‘Religions of the Book’ - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). As we will see, it is of some consequence that the Semitic tradition is believed to have evolved in the same area where the ‘new religion’ of the Black Bull and Black Goddess, i.e. the religion of the Black God, evolved.

According to the Proto-Semitic lexicon as it has been reconstructed from the various Semitic languages, the name of God in Proto-Semitic religious tradition consisted of two letters, $I$. These letters are conventionally vocalized as Elor II, but this is only an old Western convention out of ignorance of the true phonetics. More recent data allows us to be more precise. It is the second letter which is actually the ‘nucleus’ of the divine name, the Proto-Semitic phoneme which was a “dark” $l$ (velarized alveolar lateral approximant), a quite heavy /written /.$ As an oral consonant, air is allowed to escape through the mouth, producing a thick “lah” sound when pronounced. The first letter ( ), a glottal stop, was a consonantal sound – a smooth breathing – produced when the vocal cords are constricted to interrupt the flow of air and then released. The sound of the released air – an ‘ah’ sound – is the consonantal sound, transliterated simply as an initial ‘a’. Thus, the vocalization of the Proto-Semitic divine name FiṣA-Ṣahl, which eventuated in the Hebrew $מ$אלה $Alah$, the Syriac $מ$אלא $Alāhā$ and the Arabic $فا$حل $Allah$, $299$


$298$ On the initial “A” in this Proto-Semitic divine name see Werner Daum, *Ursemitische Religion* (Stuttgart; Berlin; Köln; Mainz: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1985) 77-78.

$299$ Alice Faber points out that the name *Alāhā* is the lone surviving example in Arabic of this Proto-Semitic phoneme (*f*). “Nature of Proto-Semitic *l*”.

$300$ Frank Moor Cross has argued that Proto-Semitic *f* is an archaic bilateral that was extended to a trilateral by the Western Semites (Ugaritic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic) with the orthographic addition of an *h*(*/h*/). *TDOT*: 242 s.v. by Cross; *DDD*: 37 s.v. *Alahā* by D. Pardee, 285. On the other hand LaSor (“Proto-Semitic,” 205) suggests that both *l* and *h* were part of the Proto-Semitic lexicon. In the dialects of epigraphic Arabian one finds both *l* and *h* (S.D. Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian* [StP 14; Rome, 1989] 10-11). On *Alāhā* as an ancient variant of *Allah* see Patricia Turner and Charles Russell Coulter, *Dictionary of Ancient Deities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 37 s.v. Allah. On *Allah*’s relation to *l* and the Ugaritic “El” see also Finn O. Hvidberg-Hansen, “Fra El til Allah,” in Frede Lokkegaard, Egon Keck, Svend Søndergaard, Ellen Wulff (eds.), *Living waters: Scandinavian orientalistic studies presented to Frede Lokkegaard on his seventy-fifth birthday, January 27th 1990* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1990) 113-127.

Proto-Semitic $\mathfrak{f}(\text{Alah})$

Stage I

$\mathfrak{f}$Akkadian $l(\text{alah})$ South Arabic $l(\text{alah})$
Syriac 'alāhā’ Hebrew ‘alāh
Stage III

Arabic Ālāh

What do we know of this Proto-Semitic I (Alah)? He was the almighty Creator God. He appears as such in both Ugaritic and Old South Arabian, thus in the north and the south of the peninsula. But we can say more. Ancient Middle Eastern religion has been described as a broad and languid river which from time to time and in different places splits into a multiplicity of sidechannels, later reunited, and always moving in the same direction. One side-channel that is most characteristic of the


‘general flow’ of Aрафbian religion is the South Arabian religious tradition. Stephen Langdon, in his discussion of Semitic mythology, assumed that South Arabia was the original home of Semitic religion and remains the place where ‘pure and undefiled’ Semitic religion may be examined. More recently Werner Daum has argued that it is in South Arabia, the two Yemens in particular, which is “still that part of the Middle East which most vividly retains the manners and customs of ancient Arabia.” South Arabia, therefore, “conveys Arabia’s yesterworld,” religiously as well as culturally.

The epigraphic evidence confirms that I, also written lh, was the supreme creator-god all over southern Arabia. While later deities such as ‘Attar the moon-god will replace las the most important South Arabian deity, he, Shams the sun-goddess and others arrived on the scene only later, brought south by Mesopotamian immigrants. // this eventually ‘crowded out’ by these nature deities. In Old South Arabian he was also the paragon of righteousness, as Ulf Oldenburg informs us:

The numerous theophorous names composed with the proper name of ‘El[read: Alah] illuminate the distinct character of El and his original glory. He was called ‘the first’ and ‘exalted’, the king above all, and therefore his title the King became another name for El. He was characterized by his strength...As the

303 Langdon, Semitic Religion, 3-6.


305 S.D. Ricks, Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian (StP 14; Rome, 1989) 10-11.


almighty king of creation he ruled in righteousness, and Righteousbecame the name of El, by which he is invoked in the oldest class of personal names; it reveals El as the author and standard of righteousness. He was the great judge of all men, who in his infinite wisdom pronounced righteous judgment rendering to every one according to his deeds and severely punished iniquity. But above all he was known for his great love and mercy as he willingly pardoned sin and blessed his creatures with health and long life...The terms of kinship ‘father, uncle, brother’, which are so abundant in the oldest names reflect a patriarchal social organization typical of nomadic tribes. El belonged to the clan as head of it, and his function was that of a guardian defending the rights of its members...Another important name of El was Savior.”

Alah had a feminine complement, Alat and the two are the same as the Allah and Allat (or: al-Lāh and al-Lāt) of later Arabic orthography. “Just as the highest god,” Ditilef Nielsen informed us, “was simply known as Il or Ilah ‘God’, so the wife of this god was simply known as ‘goddess,’ Ilat or Ilahat.” She is the ‘Queen of Heaven’ and ‘Mother of the Gods.’ In Ugaritic texts dated prior to 1200 BCE she is called trt ym., “She Who Strides ( tr) on the Sea (yam),” later shortened to Athirat ( trt). She is thus an aquatic Mother Goddess, as we would expect. This attribute sheds further light on the nature and character of the divine feminine complement. According to Oldenberg the name Athirat is also related to the noun trt which means ‘sanctuary,’ E. Lipiński points out that the Hebrew cognate of the Ugaritic term, ašêrā, which is the name of the Hebrew Mother Goddess, likewise means ‘shrine, holy place.’

This


310

theme, which we have already encountered, will have great significance for us later: the aquatic female complement of the male god is identified as his temple or shrine. Below we shall see just how the ancients understood the male god to ‘inhabit’ the feminized ‘temple’.

In 1985 German scholar Werner Daum published an important monograph, Ursemische Religion (“ProtoSemitic Religion”). Daum suggests that our best evidence for reconstructing the ‘Ursemische Religion’ comes from southern Arabia. By a close study of ancient South Arabian inscriptions and modern Yemeni folktales and ritual practices, Daum was able to produce a convincing reconstruction of proto-Semitic Religion, or at least important aspects thereof. The most important observation for our purposes is that, according to Daum’s reconstruction, the high god of the proto-Semites was a black god. This Proto-Semitic black deity was depicted as an old, bearded man and associated with the black rain cloud and the black bull (and ibex, the “bull-goat”). These, Daum tells us, “symbolisieren den dunklen Il (“symbolized the dark Il”).” He was called šaḥa, “old man.” Thus, the Proto-Semitic God (Collision between El and Baal) Afahis the god of the ‘new religion’ of the Levant, the Black God: symbolized by the Black Bull!

The British historian Julian Baldick followed up and expanded upon Daum’s research with Black God: The Afroasiatic Roots of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim Religions. Baldick’s research suggested that, just as there is an ‘Afroasiatic’ language group indigenous to North Africa and Arabia, there is likewise an ‘Afroasiatic’ religious tradition indigenous to the same area and peculiar to the same groups. This ‘Afroasiatic’ religious tradition is characterized by a dualistic logic which emphasizes the male-female dichotomy and by a divine triad consisting of a Black rain god, a goddess, and a young hero god. Among the Oromo of southern Ethiopia, e.g. God is called Waqa Quracca meaning Black (Quracca) God.

The architecture of the Barbar temples, he says, “reveals a high standard of technical competence.” The architecture is similar to and thus suggests some connection with the earliest Sumerian temple architecture. The fine quality of the recovered objects indicates that a high culture flourished there. And even though these temples are considered the most important ancient structures in the entire gulf region thus far identified, they do not represent the beginning of Afrabian civilization and high culture; the Barbar period only represents the high point of a civilization that had already flourished for millennia prior.

Who was the resident deity at Barbar? While a number of suggestions have been made, we can only guess his identity. His character is clear however from the recovered artifacts and seals. Most important is the remarkable copper bull head, indicating that we have here a temple of the bull god (Figure 24). This is confirmed by the collection of seals uncovered from the Dilmun region in general where the bull and the ibex are prominently represented. One seal is of particular significance: it depicts an anthropomorphic deity with a crown of bull horns on, enthroned on a bull (Figure 25). The bull-god of Barbar had aquatic associations: the heart of the temple is a
sacred well which may represent what was thought to be an entrance to the underground primordial waters.\footnote{Robert G. Hoyland, \textit{Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam} (London an New York: Routledge, 2001) 196, PL 31.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure24.png}
\caption{Barbar Temple Bull head}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure25.png}
\caption{Dilmun Seal with enthroned Bull god}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure26.png}
\caption{Excavated ruins of Barbar Temple}
\end{figure}
All of this, plus the obvious connections with Sumer, has convinced many scholars that the resident deity at Barbar was none other than the Sumerian deity Enki who likely entered the Mesopotamian area from Dilmun, i.e. from the Arabian Gulf. In other words, the god that would become the important Sumerian/Akkadian deity Enki/Ea probably originated in eastern Arabia. His myth sheds light on the central myth of the ‘new religion’ as it spread far and wide after originating in the Levant. Understanding the character of this god therefore gives us great insight into the religion of ancient Afrabia, the matrix of Islam.

IV.1. ‘Enki’ and the Religion of the Black God

The earliest evidence of this deity is likely the reed hut shrine unearthed in Eridu (Mesopotamia) dated ca. 5000 BCE, which is likely dedicated to this god. Enki was the supreme, creator god of ancient Mesopotamia, and he was the Black God, the Bull God, par excellence. He personified the primordial black waters (abzu/apsû), and was himself personified in the black bull and the ibex. As the creator god, he personified male reproductive power, signaled by his ‘phallocentrism’ in Sumerian myth.

Most discussions of Mesopotamian religion see the pantheon as topped by a triad: (1) An, the god of heaven, the highest god; (2) Enlil, the god of ‘wind’, of second rank; and (3) Enki/Ea, god of earth and the subterranean waters, of third rank. Samuel Kramer even thought Enki’s subordination to Enlil produced in the former an ‘inferiority complex’ (‘Enki and his Inferiority Complex,’ *Orientalia* [1970] 103-110). However, it has been cogently argued that this situation did not prevail in the earliest period. According to Piotr Steinkeller “Enki undoubtedly was the original head of the pantheon.” Steinkeller suggests that Enlil was a secondary development in the Sumerian Pantheon: “On Rulers, Priests and Sacred Marriage: Tracing the Evolution of Early Sumerian Kingship,” in Kazuko Watanabe (ed.), *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the Second Colloquium on the Ancient Near East—the City and its Life held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan* (Minaka, Tokyo, March 22-24, 1996) [Heidelberger Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999] 113-114. Piotr Michalowski agrees that Enlil was a late comer to the Sumerian pantheon and usurped the prime position of Enki, "THE male player" of the pantheon: “The Unbearable Lightness of Enlil,” in Jiri Prosecky (ed.), *Intelectual Life in the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the 43rd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Prague, July 1-5, 1996* (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Oriental Institute, 1998) 241. 333He is called am-gig-abzu, “black bull of the apsû”; am-an-ki, “wild bull of heaven and earth” dara-abzubīx of thea apsû. See W.F. Albright, "The Mouth of the Rivers," *JAOS* 35 (1911): 167; Nugent, “Star-god: Enki/Ea,” 21.


Steinkeller, “On Rulers, Priests and Sacred Marriage” 113 describes him as: “Enki, a personification of male reproductive power, the god of fresh water and creative intelligence.”

Jerrold S. Cooper, “Enki’s Member: Eros and Irrigation in Sumerian Literature,” in Hermann Behrens, Darlene Loding, and T. Roth (edd), *DUMU-E2-DUB-BA-A:* Now the deity An (Sumerian AN, Akkadian Anu) is actually presented in the literature as the creator and supreme head of the Sumerian pantheon, Enki being a son. But An seems to have created only half of the cosmos, at least as An. The other half, the ‘lower half’, was created by his first-born son, called in Sumerian texts Enki and in Akkadian texts Ea. 338The relation of Enki to An appears, however, to be much more complex and intimate than that of father and son. In the En3ma elic, the famous Babylonian creation account, Ea (Enki) is created by An (Anu) as his “likeness,” 339indicating that, as Richard J. Clifford perceives, “Ea is equal to Anu.” 340aEqual” here, however, means identical. This is indicated by the mystical numbers the Mesopotamians attributed to their deities. Each of the major gods was given a mystical number from the sexagesimal (base-sixty) counting system. In Akkadian Anu has two mystical numbers, 1 and 60, denoting not only that he is the supreme god of the pantheon, but also that he is “the first (god), the heavenly father, the greatest one in heaven and earth, (and) the one who contains the entire universe.” 341As Simo Parpola explains: “As ‘One and Sixty’ Anu’s number comprised the mystic numbers of all other gods: he was the Alpha and the Omega”, 342According to Parpola the Mesopotamian pantheon can be reduced to “mere aspects of a few ‘great gods,’ and these again to mere aspects or powers of a single universal God”. This indicates “a sophisticated monothestic system of thought sharply deviating from the current simplistic notion of Mesopotamian religion and philosophy.” 343In other words, all of the gods can be reduced to aspects or attributes – manifestations, if you will – of the one god An/Anu. 344Enki/Ea’s case is particular in that he, like Anu, has two mystical numbers: 1 and 60, An/Anu’s exact numbers. 345Thus Enki, An’s ‘first-born’, is actually An himself at a secondary stage of manifestation. This is why, though only one supreme deity can actually be the “creator of everything,” “father of the gods,” “archetype of the creation of heaven and earth,” etc, both An and Enki are so called. 346

The iconography helps us to better understand the ‘stage’ that Enki represents viz-ā-viz An. Enki is famously depicted inside a rectangular shrine made of water (Figure 28). This represents the god inside his temple which is identified with the abzu/apsû, also written ENGUR in Sumerian. The abzu/apsû is the black primordial waters, out of which Enki built his zigurat temple called É-sira, “House of the neter-sea” and É-engurra, “House of the ENGUR (Abzu).” 347Tony Nugent insightfully brings to our attention the fact that this iconography mirrors the original cuneiform ideogram for ENGUR: the 348An sign (star) enclosed within a rectangle

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343 Ibid., 184 n. 90.
being the asterisk, a cuneiform star with eight points (written DINGIR), later modified to a wedge cross.\textsuperscript{349} Enki, who is called the “bright light in the heaven” and “Great Light of the Apsû,”\textsuperscript{350} is thus identified with the god An: he is the god An enclosed within the watery temple.\textsuperscript{351} As An is the ‘star-god’ par excellence, Enki is the ‘star-god of the waters,’ to use Nugent’s terms.\textsuperscript{352}

What does “star-god of the waters” actually indicate or imply? It indicates that the luminous god of heaven, An, incarnated within a black, aquatic body produced from the primordial waters, the Apsû, becoming thereby Enki. In Mesopotamian tradition “Water endows the being with form”.\textsuperscript{353} This is further confirmed by the ‘temple theology’ of Mesopotamia and the ancient Near East.\textsuperscript{354} The temple was considered an architectonic icon: an image in stone of the god. As Mark S. Smith puts it, speaking of the West Semitic tradition: “temples tell not only where the deities are, but also what and how they are.”\textsuperscript{355} In particular, the temple architecture symbolically reflects the anthropomorphic body of the god and ‘houses’ the story of how this divine body emerged out of the primordial waters.\textsuperscript{356} Thus, the seven levels of the Mesopotamian ziggurat or stepped-pyramid represent the seven stages of the divine descent from the highest heaven into material enmeshment (incarnation; Figure 29).\textsuperscript{357} The temple is thus the link between heaven and earth, dur-an-ki, its top portion touching heaven, its bottom reaching deep into the Abzu.\textsuperscript{358} The lowest level of the ziggurat and the exterior walls of the temple present the external
body of the god, which is associated with the primordial waters: thus the undulating course of the bricks on the external walls of the Egyptian temple are designed to imitate the waves of Nun, the primordial waters in Egyptian cosmogonic thought. Enki’s ‘dark house’ made from the black primordial waters thus signals his dark bodily appearance. This black appearance, lastly, is associated with the Bull.


On Enki’s “dark (Sum. kukku) house” see Wolfgang Heimpel, “Anthropomorphic and Bovine Lahmus,” in Manfried Dietrich and Oswald Loretz (edd.), dubsar anta-men: Studien zu Altorientalistik. Festschrift für Willem H. Ph. Romer zur Vollendung seines 70. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998) n. 41. That this architectural darkness reflects somatic (soma = “body”) darkness is indicated in a particularly significant text cited by Thorkild Jacobsen (TC, V, 47, 1.2): “Ea resembles the apsû, the apsû resembles the sea, the sea Ereshkigal” (Thorkild Jacobsen, “Sumerian Mythology: A Review Article,” JNES [1946]: 141). Enki/Ea himself thus has the appearance of the black primordial waters.

In hymns Enki’s temple is compared to a bull and it was topped by bovine horns. Wayne Horowitz, Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1998) 124; S. Langdon, “Two Sumerian Hymns from Eridu and Nippur,” American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature 3 (1923): 164, 165, 169.

Mesopotamian seven-level ziggurat and the seven-stage divine descent from spirit to coarse matter

Figure 29

(1) Spirit

(2) Soul (Vehicle of Spirit)
Enki as Coniunctio oppositorum

We have here the means to reconcile the two contrasting descriptions of Enki: on the one hand as “bright light in the heavens,” “Great Light of the Apsû,” who “radiantly appears in heaven and earth”\(^{362}\); and on the other hand as “black bull of the Apsû” whose appearance resembles the black waters of the underworld.\(^{363}\) We see that Enki is a composite deity; the union of the star-god *par excellence*, An, with the primordial waters produced Enki, the Black Bull of the Apsû.\(^{364}\) He is the *Coniunctio oppositorum* personified. This is confirmed by an Archaic Period Mesopotamian seal. Enki is depicted bearded and enthroned, crowned with bull-horned cap. Fishes are depicted swimming up non-existent streams toward his knees – a representation of the god’s aquatic nature – and flames spring up from his shoulders – the mark of a solar character.\(^{365}\) In an Assyrian seal the god is depicted in his characteristic rectangular, watery shrine with the sun disk.\(^{366}\) This equally resolves the apparent conflict between the descriptions of An himself as the luminous star deity of heaven and his own close association with the black bull. Indeed, An can be considered the Bull God *par excellence*: his characteristic attribute animal was the black bull (Figure 30).\(^{367}\) Besides the cuneiform star, An’s other particular emblem is the cap with bull horns, which became the mark of divinity in Mesopotamian iconography.\(^{368}\) Not only is
An ritualistically identified with a bull “black as asphalt,” but the black hide of the bull is identified with the divine skin of An/Anu. Lastly, this might explain why An, the star-god, can be associated with jugs of water.


In one description of the Babylonian *kaḫḫu*-ritual the slaying and skinning of the sacrificial bull, ‘black as asphalt,’ is mythologized as the god Bēl’s slaying and flaying of the god Anu, whose characteristic attribute animal was the black bull. See Alasdair Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2007) 117 (VAT 10099).

The paradigmatic *Coniunctio oppositorum* involves a union of masculine and feminine principles. This is true in this case as well. It seems that in the early Uruk period of Mesopotamian religion, when Enki was the chief deity of the pantheon, he was paired in most city-states with a female complement. At this time, Piotr Michalowski suggests, “the Mesopotamian pantheon was headed by a couple associated primarily with fertility: Enki and Ninhursag. Their names may have changed over the centuries, but that is a small matter.” Ninhursag indeed was just one of the names by which Enki’s female complement was known, and Thorkild Jacobsen traces her “straight back to the neolithic precursor of the *potnia theron*, ‘the Great Goddess of Life, Death, and Regeneration,’ to use Marija Gimbutas’s term for her.” In other words, Enki’s female complement is the goddess of the ‘Woman and Bull’ religion of the Levant.

The primordial waters are feminine in Mesopotamian tradition. In fact, they are Nammu, Enki’s mother. Nammu is the “universal primordial mother” and Enki is her first born son. Most significantly Enki’s aquatic temple É-engurra, “House of the ENGUR (*Abzu*),” and thus his black body, is identified with Nammu. This equation is critically important: Nammu (dark primordial mother/waters) = Enki’s dark, rectangular aquatic temple = Enki’s black, anthropomorphic male body. Thus in the incantation text *An Address to the River of Creation* we read:

Incantation: You, River, creatress of everything, When the Great Gods dug you, They placed good things on your banks, Within you, Ea, the king of the Apsu, built his home.

What these equations signify is that the aquatic temple (Éengurra) represents a black body made from the feminine substance of the primordial waters (Nammu) within which divine luminance (i.e. An) incarnated or indwelled. That this male,
anthropomorphic black body is symbolized by a feminine rectangular black shrine will take on greater importance as we discuss the Ka’ba cult of Mecca.


374 Rice, <em>Archaeology of the Arabian Gulf</em>, 130 also points out: “The Sumerian cosmology held that in the beginning was the primeval sea, represented as female”.


376 Nammu is written with the ENGUR sign and in the Yale Syllabary Nammu is equated with Abzu. See Jacobsen, “Sumerian Mythology,” 130.


The significance of the feminine divine in the Mesopotamian articulation of the ‘new religion’ must be further explored in order to understand the divine feminine in later articulations, such as in Egypt and Mecca. Two myths that give us great insight in this regard are called Nammu and Enki and Enki and Ninhursag. Nammu and Enki recounts the creation of man and woman by Nammu and Enki. Enki is here “the creator of all myriads in existence.” These two, Nammu and Enki, are coexistent from the beginning in this myth.

378 However Nammu, as mother of the gods, is also Enki’s mother, he being called her ‘son’ (<i>dumu</i>). Yet, Enki takes her in marriage - she is now his wife - and impregnates her, apparently with the gods and the cosmos. Enki brought forth from Nammu’s womb man and woman.

What is significant is how the marriage of Enki and Nammu is described. Theirs is a particular type of marriage with implications for understanding later developments of the myth associated with the ‘new religion’: it is an entrance marriage in which the husband enters the house and family of the wife. The children take the woman’s name and perpetuate only this family name.

379 The husband who enters the wife’s house and takes her family name is analogous to the male god, An, entering the black body (temple made from primordial matter/mother, <i>Apsû/Nammu</i>) and thence forth known by her family names (Enki, “Lord of the earth,” rather than En-an, “Lord of Heaven”).

That this ‘marriage’ has somatic ( <i>soma =</i> body) significance and actually alludes to the divine male incarnating within a feminine’ body (substance-wise) is confirmed by the myth known as Enki and Ninhursaq. In this narrative Enki’s relations with seven or eight female characters are recounted.

380 These female character’s all seem to be variants of Enki’s commonly recognized wife, called in this myth Damgalnuna, herself likely a form of Nammu. Damgalnuna, called the ‘birth-goddess of the great gods’ and ‘Great Lady of the Waters,’ seems to be a form of the primordial mother-goddess. <i>Enki and Ninhursaq</i> opens with Enki and Ninsikilla – Damgalnuna’s first guise – ‘asleep’ within the primeval ‘city’ before the creation of the ‘real’ world. In the cosmogonic texts ‘city’ is a way of metaphorically describing the pre-creation period. It is thus not surprising to find the male and female principles asleep – inactive – during this time.


382 See Clifford, <em>Creation Accounts</em>, 18-19.

383 Bennett Alster (“<i>Enki and Ninhursaq</i>,” 16) argues that, while cosmogony is not the main theme, this does seem to be a myth of creation from a very specific point of view. 384-Enki and Ninhursaq,” 30.


residing in his temple: incarnation in a material body. With Enki “lodged within” Ninhursaq’s body they are able together to bring forth gods and cosmic order and stability. While this ‘creation process’ is the result of the collaborative efforts of the male and female deities, and the former is incorporated within the latter, it is important to point out that in this narrative Enki is still the lone creator. Even the birth metaphor that is used here returns to Enki: he is the one who, inside the body of the birth-goddess, is ‘pregnant’ with the creations. Indeed, the main emphasis of <i>Enki and Ninhursagis</i> the body of Enki,
The acts and tribulations,” Dickson informs us, “of Enki’s body traversing, modifying, and being modified by female bodily space have in a sense been the subject of the myth all along.”

Enki’s [read: An’s] luminous body has indeed been modified: it is now incarnated within a black, aquatic body. This is undoubtedly the mythic motif behind his designation, ‘the first god to walk/ride the waves.

IV.1.2. Enki and the Myth of the Black God

The Mesopotamian version of the ‘Myth of the Black God’ is therefore the following:

The ‘beginning’ began with an inchoate state of undifferentiation. This dark, aquatic undifferentiated mass,

considered feminine and personified as a cow, was uncreated. Within this there existed a luminous, masculine numen.

At some point this numen produced in the primordial waters a ‘seed,’ mythological language for the primordial atom or the first distinct particle of matter.

Out of this ‘seed’ the divinity grew, this growth leading eventually to the separation of heaven (an) and earth (ki) out of this mass.

This separation is the first act in the cosmogenic process.

What this ‘separation’ seems to mean is that the luminous numen – heaven (an) personified in the god An (₄An) – emerged out of this ‘seed’ (atom) and separated from the dark watery mass.

The god An apparently created a ‘heavenly’ realm, luminous and ‘pure,’ but arid, virtual and full of dormant potentiality rather than being vibrant and ‘real.’

Horowitz, Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography, 335 notes: “No Sumerian text preserves an account of the creation of the Apsu or the separation of the Apsu from heaven and earth in early times. This apparently indicates that the Sumerians conceived the Apsu to be a primordial element”. Rice, Archaeology of the Arabian Gulf, 130 also points out: “The Sumerian cosmology held that in the beginning was the primeval sea, represented as female”. The Babylonian Tiamat (primordial salt-waters) seems also to have been presented as a bovine in the En₂₄ma el₂₄: see B. Landsberger and J.V. Kinnier Wilson, “The Fifth Tablet of Enuma Elis,” JNES 20 (1961): 175 [art.=154-179]. See also Clifford, Creation Accounts, 26.


In one presargonic text we read: “The divine lord (₄EN) was coming of age, Heaven and earth, (still) together, were screaming – in those days Enki and Nunki (sic) were not yet alive, Enlin was not yet alive, Ninlil was not yet alive.” Frans Wiggermann remarks: “I take this to mean that the divine lord (₄EN), the active, procreative element in the god name (₄EN-ki), grows inside Heaven and Earth still united, and starts the painful process of separation”;


In one late Babylonian ritual text we read that “Anu had engendered heaven (And) Ea had founded earth.” In another: “When Anu built the heavens: Nudimmud (Ea) built the

The second act of the cosmogonic process is a re-uniting of these elements: luminous heaven (₄An) reunites with the dark, aquatic ‘earth’ in a cosmic marriage, producing from this union the ‘real world,’ starting with the great gods.

The first great god produced from this union is (An-)Enki.

Enki’s emergence is eloquently described: his luminous self (i.e. An) emerged from the seed (atom). He declares in the myth called Enki and the World Order: “I am the fecund seed, engendered by the great wild ox (An). I am the first born son of An.”

This divine declaration is revealing. The seed or primordial atom engendered by that luminous numen (here explicitly identified with An) is itself identified with Enki. Again, An and Enki are the same divine being, God the Father and God the Son. The designation ‘Enki’ usually refers to An at his secondary stage, when the luminosity and the waters are joined in marriage. ‘Marriage’ is a positive metaphorical description of this stage. However, other texts use more negative metaphors, like ‘descent’ or, worse, ‘captivity’ and ‘enslavement’. This is the case in the mythic fragment Thorild Jacobsen called “The Descent of Enki.”

In this mythic fragment Enki’s descent to and enslavement within the aquatic underworld is recounted. The temporal setting of this ‘descent’ is explicitly stated to be after the separation of heaven and earth. An seems to have “shipped off” Enki (i.e. An himself) to this netherworld, where Enki is ‘battered,’ ‘torn into,’ and ‘smeared’ by the raging waters. Jacobsen suggests that this divine descent in this mythic fragment concerns different “modes of being.”

This seems right: a change in the divine ‘mode of being’. That is to say, this ‘descent’ no doubt represents a change from the luminous An to the dual Enki...

Quoted from Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 34


is a luminous god incarnated in a black, aquatic body. In other words, we have here to do with a somatic (soma = body) descent or transformation. We have a remarkable literary depiction of Enki’s epiphany, i.e. An’s emergence from the black waters as Enki:

When Enki arose the fishes rose and adored him, He stood, a marvel unto the Apsu, Brought joy to Enqu, To the sea it seemed that An was upon him, To the Great River it seemed that terror hovered about him."

"That An was upon him” surely signifies the luminance of An radiating from Enki, even with his black body. Thus Enki’s ‘dark’

That this ‘descent of Enki’ to the dark, aquatic underworld represents a somatic transformation is supported by current research indicating that these ancient Mesopotamian descent myths (e.g. *Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld*) undergird later Gnostic descent myths, and as such both may be equally illuminating for the other. In particular, Mehmet-Ali Ataç has argued convincingly that these Mesopotamian myths are at the root of the later Manichaean cosmogonic myth of the luminous First Man to the Realm of Darkness (“Manichaeism and Ancient Mesopotamian ‘Gnosticism’,” *JANER* 39; see also Simo Parpola, “Mesopotamian Precursors of the Hymn of the Pearl,” in R. M. Whiting [ed.], *Mythology and Mythologies: Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences, Proceedings of the Second Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project Held in Paris, France, October 4-7, 1999* [Melammu Symposia II; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001] 181-193). Manichaean cosmogonic myth begins with two coeval but antagonistic realms, the Real of Light (Good Realm) and the Realm of Darkness (Evil Realm). The Lord of the Real of Light is the Father of Greatness, sends his first born son, the luminous First Man, who is actually the Father at a secondary stage, down to the Realm of Darkness where he was ‘devoured’ and imprisoned by the darkness, becoming in the process “The Bright One in Darkness”. As Ataç points out, “It is the Father of Greatness himself in his incarnation as the First Man who ultimately descends into the Realm of Darkness (‘Manichaeism’, 7). These two figures correspond well with An and Enki: An, the luminous Father, incarnates in his first born son, Enki, who is also luminous. When An ‘ships off’ Enki to the realm of darkness, it is actually he himself who descends. Like the Manichaean First Man, An-Enki becomes ‘the Bright One in Darkness.” On the Manichaean First Man see Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) 107-112; Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God & the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 [1958]).


IV.1.3. An-Enki = Afah

The ‘resident god’ of the Barbar Temple Complex in Eastern Arabia is thus the Black God of later Mesopotamian tradition. *En-ki,* “Lord of the Earth,” is his Sumerian designation, though this is likely an epithet rather than a name. It is possible that he had an earlier, pre-Sumerian Semitic name. His Akkadian designation, *Ea,* is usually translated as ‘House of Water.’ But this is a Sumerian meaning, not Akkadian (in Sumerian *É-a* = House [É] of water [a]). Pointing this out Cyrus Gordon argues that *Ea* is actually a West Semitic name meaning “The Living One.” Samuel Noah Kramer suggests that Enki’s Akkadian name *Ea* actually pre-Sumerian, the name the Ubaidians gave this water-god. This too, however, seems to be an epithet rather than a name. The evidence indicates most clearly that his earliest Semitic name is the proto-Semitic *Afah.*

The cuneiform is the Sumerian ideogram DINGIR indicating the god An and also the word ‘god’ in general and ‘heaven/sky’. It has the phonetic value *an.* DINGIR often serves as a determinative for ‘divinity’ as well, affixed to a name to indicate that the name is that of a deity. As a determinative DINGIR is not pronounced and it appears in transliterations as a superscript ‘d’ (e.g. *dENKI*). DINGIR’s Akkadian equivalent is

It has the same properties as the Sumerian: it indicates the god Anu, means as well ‘god’ in general, and serves as an unpronounced determinative for ‘deity/divinity’. There is one critical difference, however: its phonetic value is *l,* i.e. the Proto-Semitic *Afah.* In other words the Sumerian An is the same as the Akkadian *l,* the Proto-Semitic *Afah.* It has been demonstrated through theophorous names (names of individuals which include divine names in them) that *l* is the predominant

...
name of God in the Early Dynastic period amongst the Mesopotamian Semites, indicating that this Proto-Semitic deity was the chief deity. There is therefore merit to Piotr Michalowski’s suggestion that the divine pair that headed the early Mesopotamian pantheon, Enki and Ninhursag, are the same II and Ashtar (read: Akhah and Akhat) of Early Dynastic Period. Since the Sumerian An-Enki is identical with the Akkadian (thus Proto-Semitic) for Akah. In other words, AN-ENKI IS ALLAH. The resident deity of the Barbar Temple Complex in Eastern Arabia was therefore Allah, the Black God. 409 Dietz Otto Edzard, Sumerian Grammar (Handbook of Oriental Studies 71; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). 410 Langdon, Semitic Mythology, 65. 411 J. Gell, Old Akkadian Writing and Grammar (Materials for the Assyrian Dictionary [MAD] II; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) 6ff; idem, Glossary of Old Akkadian (MAD III, 1957) 26-36; J.J.M. Roberts, The Earliest Semitic Pantheon: A Study of Semitic Deities Attested in Mesopotamia before Ur III (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1972) 31-35; TDOT 1:243 s.v. by F.M. Cross. 412 Michalowski “Unbearable Lightness of Enil,” 245. V. From Afrabian Akveh to Egyptian Rah Yosef ben-Jochannan makes the following statement in his work, The Black Man’s North and East Africa: Should people of African origin have to continue compromising themselves to writings that profess a “SEMITIC JEHOVAH” and/or “JESUS CHRIST,” or even a “HAMILIC AL’LAH” as “…THE ONE AND ONLY TRUE GOD…”? No. Africans should be fully aware of the fact that “I AM” – the GOD RA…” of the Nile Valleys (Blue and White) and the Great Lakes regions of Alkebu-lan (Africa) predated all three of the other GODS mentioned before by thousands of years. In other words, because – according to ben-Jochannan – the Egyptian deity Rah predated the Islamic deity Allah (and Jehova and Jesus) by ‘thousands’ of years, African peoples have no business professing these Johnny-come-lately gods, profession that compromises us, presumably our ‘African consciousness’. While strong in terms of cultural ideology, this claim is historically unreliable. Rah is mentioned in the Third Dynasty during the reign of Djoser (2635-2610 BCE) but doesn’t come to prominence until the Pyramid Texts deriving from the Fifth Dynasty and dates to around 2400-2300 BCE.414 We have demonstrated above that the Proto-Semitic language as reconstructed by linguists, which may have evolved anywhere from 9000 to 5000 BCE, included in its lexicon the name Hh, i.e. Akah, as the name of God.415 Besides this Proto-Semitic evidence, the Semitic evidence is equally inconsistent with the above claim. The word Hh appears at the top of a list of gods as the Ancient of Gods or the Father of all Gods in the ruins of the Royal Library of Ebla, in the archaeological site of Tell Mardikh in Syria dated to 2300 BCE.416 The Akkadian evidence documents the name even earlier, to the Pre-Sargonic Period (2700-2600).417 It cannot then be said that Rah predated Allah (as Akah) “by thousands of years.” Indeed, Rah is undoubtedly an Egyptianization of the Proto-Semitic Akah. As described above, the Proto-Semites no doubt branched off in Western Asia (the Levant) – maybe around 9-8000 BCE – from an Afroasiatic stock that itself originated in Africa. Later, a group (or groups) of Afrabian (Kushite) Semites reentered North Africa – maybe around 6000 BCE – forming an important constituent part of the historic Egyptian population.418 These Kushite Semites contributed to the language, art and religion of historic Egypt, and may account for the obvious mythological and iconographic debt Egyptian civilization owes to Western Asia. Already in 1922 Sidney Smith pointed out the parallels between the myths of Asar, Osiris’s Egyptian name, and Assar, the Babylonian deity, parallels that “trade intercourse alone cannot be held to account for.”421 Not only are the names
One particularly important mythological contribution these Afrabian Semites made to Egyptian religion is undoubtedly the introduction of the Sun God, Rah, to the Egyptian pantheon. He is explicitly documented only by the Fifth Dynasty when his priests became dominant and he ascended the top of the Heliopolitan pantheon. The center of Rah’s worship was called Annu, which the Greeks called ‘Heliopolis,’ meaning ‘City of the Sun.’ The city of Annu was founded by the Anu people, those Afrabians conquered by the Nubian ‘Dynastic Race’ which we encountered above. This fact alone should make the idea of Rah as an Afrabian introduction into Egypt unremarkable. E.A.


Wallis Budge, in his study *The Gods of the Egyptians*, informs us thus:

In considering the struggle which went on between the followers of Rā and Osiris it is difficult not to think that there was some strong reason for the resistance which the priests of Rāmet with from the Egyptians generally, and it seems as if the doctrine of Rā contained something which was entirely foreign to the ideas of the people. The city of Heliopolis appears always to have contained a mixed population, and its situation made it a very convenient halting-place for travelers passing from Arabia and Syria into Egypt and vice versa; it is, then, most probable that the doctrine of Rās taught by the priests of Heliopolis was a mixture of Egyptian and Western Asiatic doctrines, and that it was the Asiatic element in it which the Egyptians resisted. It could not have bee sun-worship which they disliked, for they had been sun-worshippers from time immemorial.

The myth and worship of Rah, like that of Osiris, seems indeed to have included elements derived from Afrabia. Budge is sure it is not sun-worship itself that is foreign, but his protégé and successor as Keeper of the Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum, Henry Reginald Hall, disagreed with his former teacher. In his great work, *The Ancient History of the Near East*, Hall writes:

> while archaeology knows of no definite foreign invasion of the Nile Valley and (we) can with justification regard the whole of Egyptian culture as of (African) indigenous growth, a study of the religion does seem to shew a very early Semitic element.

What are some of these ‘Semitic elements’ within Egyptian religion? The English Egyptologist and Assyriologist informs us, differing with his mentor:

> We find no trace of sun-worship in…the religious beliefs of the Neolithic Egyptians. It is the old veneration of the sacred animals…that are so characteristically Egyptian…the sun-god invaded from the East…He bore a Semitic name (Ra)…

Nor did Egyptologist Elise J. Baumgartel, in her examination of Predynastic cultures, find any evidence of sun-worship. Renowned American archaeologist, biblical scholar and linguist William Foxwell Albright made an important remark in his study, “Notes on Egypto-Semitic Etymology”:

> The Egyptian Religion is the syncretism of African totemism and animism with Semitic nature worship…such divine names as…[Ra], Amun, Ptah, Min, etc. are almost certainly Semitic.

While such terms as ‘totemism’ ‘animism,’ and ‘nature worship’ are dated and inappropriate – not to say inaccurate – descriptions of African and Semitic religious traditions, the larger point appears sound: the sun-god of Egypt is an eastern deity with a Semitic name. American sociologist, historian and former chair of Stanford’s African American Studies program, St. Clair Drake, in his landmark work, *Black Folks Here and There*, suggests that Rah is “perhaps a solar god from Mesopotamia.” Rah’s eastern origin seems confirmed by the Egyptian sources. In Papyrus Boulaq (17, II, 5) Amun-Re, the Sun-God, was called


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“the Beautiful-of-Face, who comes (from) Ta-Neter”. 

We have demonstrated that Ta-Neter is Afrabia. We have here what appears to be an acknowledgment of Rah’s Afrabian derivation. But the Semitic solar deity was not named ‘Rah,’ it was ‘Laḥ.’

We know that certain early hieroglyphics originally had Semitic values that were later Egyptianized. Rah’s hieroglyph no doubt conceals a Semitic original. The following is the hieroglyph for Rah:

The disk, stroke and crouching figure are all determinatives. The only glyphs with phonetic value are thus:

The first glyph, the open mouth , is the Egyptian ‘r’, but it also doubles as ‘l’ when translating or transliterating foreign words that include an ‘l’. Because Old Egyptian did not possess an ‘l’ phonetic value, when receiving foreign words that do, the foreign ‘l’ is converted to the Egyptian . The second glyph, the forearm transliterated as , is a strong guttural sound like Arabic ‘aynor ‘ah’ sound, equivalent to the Proto-Semitic , ah. Rah’s name thus possesses the same two phonemes as does the name of the Semitic solar deity, ī. Underneath the hieroglyphic Rah is no doubt the Semitic (a)lah.

Rah had a female complement, Rat.

Like the Arabic al-Lah and al-Lat, the goddesses’ name is created simply by adding the feminine marker to the god’s name:

Thus:

Alah (Al-Lah) Alat (Al-Lat)
Rah Rat

V.1. Rah and the Myth of the Black God
Further evidence of Rah’s eastern origin is his myth, the main contours of which are clearly rooted in the ‘new religion’ of the Bull and Woman that developed in the Levant in the late Epipaleolithic/early Neolithic. 438 Rah’s myth is based in the city of Annu (Heliopolis), where he was incorporated into the local divine triad: Khepri, Rah and Atum. 439 These were not viewed as separate deities but as ‘transformations’ (from the Egyptian word kheper, ‘to come into being; to transform’) of the singular solar deity. 440 Though Atum’s name closes this triad, he actually opens the myth. Atum, whose name means ‘the All,’ was conceived both as ‘the totality of being before the creation set in motion,’ 441 the ‘sum of all matter’, 442 as well as that ‘internal, unconscious force, that became conscious of itself then manifested itself of its own will.’ 443 In other words, ‘Atum’ was the attribute given both to the dark, aquatic primordial matter – later to be called Nun – and the luminous force that resided hidden and unconscious within this matter. 444 At a certain point divine unconsciousness turned into divine consciousness and the divine luminosity concentrated itself into an atom, symbolized by the luminous egg within the dark ocean. 445 Compelled by his own will, the luminous aspect of Atum emerged – self-propelled –

443 Dunand and Zivie-Coche, Gods and Men in Egypt, 25.


445 See E.A. Wallis Budge, The Egyptian Book of the Dead (The Papyrus of Ani), Egyptian Text Transliterated and Translated (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1967) xcvi, who quotes: “there was in the beginning neither heaven nor earth, and nothing existed except a boundless primeval mass of water which was shrouded in darkness and which contained within itself the germs or beginnings, male and female, of everything which was to be in the future world. The divine primeval spirit which formed an essential part of the primeval matter felt within itself the desire to begin the work of creation, and its word woke to life the world, the form and shape of which it had already depicted to itself. The first act of creation began with the formation of an egg out of the primeval water, from which broke forth Rā, the immediate cause of all life upon earth.” On the cosmogonic egg in Egyptian tradition see further: Ringgren, “Light and Darkness,” 141; Orly Goldwasser, “Itrn – the ‘Golden Egg’ (CT IV 292b-c [B9C]),” in Essays on Ancient Egypt in honour of Herman te Velde (Groningen: Styx, 1997): 79-84; Clifford, Creation Accounts, 106, 112; R.T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959) 56. On the cosmogonic egg see further Marie-Louise von Franz, Creation Myths, revised edition (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1995), Chapter Eight (“Germ and Eggs”): ER: 36-7 s.v. Egg by Veneta Newall; idem, An Egg at Easter: A Folklore Study (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971) Chapter One; Anna-Britta Hellbom, “The Creation Egg,” Ethnos 1 (1963): 63-105; H.J. Sheppard, “Egg Symbolism in Alchemy,” Ambix 148; Philip Freunli, Myths of Creation (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc, 1965), Chapter Five; Martti Haavio, Väinämöinen: Eternal Sage(Väinämöinen: Eternal Sage 63; On the cosmic egg as prima materia see also C.G. Jung, Psychology and Alchemy (2nd ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) 202. On the golden cosmogonic egg and the primordial atom see Freunli, Myths of Creation, Chapter 15.

out of the dark, aquatic matter. This initial, luminous, self-emergent stage of the deity’s evolution is personified in the god Khepri, represented symbolically/hieroglyphically as a scarab beetle. The scarab beetle’s apparently spontaneous emergence out of a ball of dung symbolized the creator-god’s self-creation out of the primordial matter – that is, the self-formation of his own luminous anthropomorphic body. 446 With this luminous human form in all its radiant glory the creator-god is called Rah (Lah). The ‘Rah stage’ in this divine evolution is represented by the midday sun at its greatest strength.

Rah is then said to have ‘entered back into’ the primordial waters (which are now personified as the cow goddess Nut/Hathor/Meheturet 447) and assumed from them a black body: he is now the black, anthropomorphic god Atum (again). 448 Atum of the triad is Rah (Lah) himself, incarnate in a black body made from the primordial waters. 449 In later myth this black aquatic body of Rah is personified in the black deity Osiris, whose black body itself is represented by the black bull Apis, the


448 On Rah re-entering the primordial waters and becoming Atum (again) see Dunand and Zivie-Coche, Gods and Men in Egypt, 27, 45-46; Vernus, Gods of Ancient Egypt, 45. On Rah darkening and transforming into Atum see See Ringgren, “Light and Darkness,” 150; Karl W. Luckert, Egyptian Light and Hebrew Fire. Theological and Philosophical Roots of Christendom in Evolutionary Perspective (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 73. On Atum as a black god see Jules
personification of the primordial waters.⁴⁵⁰ The Egyptian Rah-Atum is thus equivalent to the Mesopotamian An-Enki. Atum, like Enki, is a duality, the Coniunctio oppositorum: in the Pyramid Texts he is both Wbn-wrr, “the Great One who shines forth,” as well as “Father Atum who is in Darkness”.⁴⁵¹ This duality is illustrated further by the hieroglyph for ‘flood’: it is a heron bird perched on a stick, an allusion to the common sight during the summer high Nile of birds clinging to wood. The heron is the sign of the Benu bird, the primeval bird of Rah-Atum.⁴⁵² The Benu embodies the radiance emanating from the sun.⁴⁵³ This hieroglyph is consistent with other Egyptian sources which affirm that the Benu bird presides over the flood. We thus have symbolized in this hieroglyph the conjunction of the solar and the aquatic.⁴⁴⁴ Atum, like Enki, is the conjunction between the solar (Rah) and the aquatic (primordial waters).


⁴⁴¹ Ringgren, “Light and Darkness,” 142.


⁴⁴³ Quirke, Cult of Ra, 28.

⁴⁴⁴ Quirke, Cult of Ra, 29-30.

As we would expect, Rah-Atum is the Black Bull. An inscription fragment from the Hatshepsut Temple at Deir el-Bahri records an invocation to Rah: “Rise, rise: shine, shine. Ascend, O he who emerges from his egg (atom), Lord of Appearances, Primeval God of the Two Lands, the Bull of Iunu (Annu)”.⁴⁵⁵ Rah-Atum is represented on earth in the Menwer or Mnevis Bull (“Meni the Great”), called the “Great Black,” Kemwer, because his hide was totally black and there was a sun disk and Uraeus forth,” as well as “Father Atum who is in Darkness”.

⁴⁵⁶ The Woman’s other name in Egypt is Rat, the feminine complement to Rah.

⁴⁵⁷ Hathor’s Egyptian name – Het-Heru – literally means ‘House of Horus,’ Horus being another manifestation of Rah the solar deity.⁴⁵⁸ This motif of Hathor (primordial waters) as the ‘house’ of the deity parallels the Mesopotamian motif of Nammu (primordial waters), Enki’s mother, as his temple-residence. The primordial cow-goddess (Nut/Hathor) is described as mother, wife and daughter of Rah,⁴⁵⁹ just as Nammu is both Enki’s mother and wife.⁴⁶⁰ The Woman’s other name in Egypt is Rat, the feminine complement to Rah.

It is therefore clear that the Egyptian solar deity Rah and his basic myth originated in Afrabia east of the Red Sea and is an Egyptianization of the Proto-Semitic/Semitic deity (A)Rah, just as Ilu is a Babylonianization and Eloah (Elohim) is a Hebrewization of Rah.


⁴⁵⁶ Conrad, Horn and the Sword, 76; Quirke, Cult of Ra, 109; Hart, Dictionary, 125-126 s.v. Mnevis; Ions, Egyptian Mythology, 40, 123.

⁴⁵⁷ On Hathor as universal mother, primordial cow and “female complement of the solar creator,” see Ions, Egyptian Mythology, 78; Quirke, Cult of Ra, 31.

⁴⁵⁸ Hart, Dictionary, 76 s.v. Hathor; ibid., 94 s.v. Horus.


⁴⁶⁰ See above.

the same deity.⁴⁶¹ Local area linguistic innovations over time have obscured the fact that at the root of all of these divine names is the Proto-Semitic divine name that will be retained in the Arabic as: AḤāh. Such claims that the Egyptian Rah predated the Semitic AḤāh by “thousands of years” is therefore completely unwarranted.

Proto-Semitic – I –

Babylonian Canaanite S. Arabian Egyptian

(i)l (e)l (a)l l(a)

Ilu Elohiem ilah/Allah Rah

⁴⁶¹ D. Pardee remarks that “The Hebrew word ēlōhîm derived from a base ēl, perhaps a secondary form of the common Semitic word ēl, ‘god’…The word
Chapter Four

AÏÏāh: Black God of Pre-Qur’ānic Arabia

“The most disastrous of all colonizations of the oppressor is the colonization of the image of God.”

Dr. John Henrik Clarke

I. AÏÏāh Derived From Allāt?

According to ben-Jochannan the Islamic god AÏÏāh was ‘launched’ in Arabia by the Arabian prophet Muḥammad b. #Abd Allāh, who apparently (according to ben-Jochannan) converted the female goddess Allāt into the male god AÏÏāh. The implication is of course that before Muḥammad replaced the female deity Allāt with his own creation, the male god AÏÏāh, no one worshipped the latter. Hindu nationalist Purushottan Negesh Oak likewise suggests that the male AÏÏāh derived from the early goddess. This is a most unfortunate historical reconstruction in that, while it is completely disproven by linguistic, epigraphic and historical data, it nonetheless is frequently repeated in some Afrocentrist circles. But as pioneering Canadian scholar of Islam Arthur Jeffrey points out: “The name Allah… was well known in pre-Islamic Arabia. Indeed, both it and its feminine form, Allat, are found not infrequently among the theophorous names in inscriptions from North Arabia.” The male and female pair AÏÏāh/Allāt coexisted in Arabia before Muḥammad’s time, with Allah receiving recognition as supreme creator deity. Western Islamicist and historian from the University of Minnesota, Caesar E. Farah, affirms that “Allah, the paramount deity of pagan Arabia, was the target of worship in varying degrees of intensity from the southernmost tip of Arabia to the Mediterranean.” Samuel M. Zwemer notes as well: “But history establishes beyond a shadow of a doubt that even the pagan Arabs, before Muḥammad’s time, knew their chief god by the name of AÏÏāh, and even, in a sense, proclaimed his unity.”

[462-469... references to various authors and works]

British Islamicist William Montgomery Watt has shown that AÏÏāh, before the time of Muḥammad, was what students of comparative religion know as a ‘high god.’ This means that while only one of several gods whose existence was acknowledged, AÏÏāh was the supreme deity over the others. One of these subordinate gods was in fact the goddess Allat, who was considered both the feminine complement of the male AÏÏāh and his ‘daughter’, just as we would expect by now. To suggest that Muḥammad somehow ‘converted’ the female deity Allāt into the male AÏÏāh is completely without warrant.

469 Thus Jacques Ryckmans, French historian of Pre-Islamic Arabia, writing on the gods of Pre-Islamic North Arabia notes: “Al-Ilāt or Allāt (“the Goddess”), was known to all pantheons. She is daughter or a consort, depending on the region, of al-Lāh or Allāh, Lord of the Ka#bah in Mecca”: Encyclopedia Britannica 2004 s.v. Arabian Religion.

Prophet Muḥammad did not ‘launch’ AÏÏāh or his worship in Arabia. Second century CE inscriptions from Sumatra Harabesi in the Tektek mountains, Edessa Syria, document this. At an Arab sanctuary the ‘governor of the Arabs (ṣalīhā’ a-#arab)’ left the following inscription dated to 165 CE:

Text:

(2) I, Tiridates, son of Adona, governor of ‘Arab, (3) built this altar and set up a pillar for Mār ‘Allāhā, ‘Lord Allah’

In another Sumatra inscription, dated to the mid-2nd century CE, we read what sounds like an ancient Qur’ānic passage:

I, Allāh
See him I see him
and behold

These inscriptions are 400 years prior to the beginning of Muhammad’s reform movement in Mecca. But there are more, earlier examples as well. Evidence of the worship of Allah in ancient Arabia has been found in both the Northern and Southern portions of the peninsula. It is most documented for the Liyân tribe in Northern Arabia. Four hundred Liyânite and Dedanite inscriptions dating back to the fifth century BCE were found in the Nejd (Central Arabia). In these inscriptions are invocations to Allah. For example:


H’lh ’btr bk  hsrr
‘O Alah, (god) without offspring; in Thee be joy’

F. V. Winnet, who has translated these inscriptions, lists others in his article, “Allah Before Islam.”

O Allah, permit me to accomplish salvation…
O Allah, God without offspring, greeting
O Allah, guide me that I may attain prosperity…
O Allah, God without offspring, knower of men…

Allāh is called in these inscriptions “The Exalted”: Give favor to this rock, O Exalted Allah.

This Liyânite inscriptional material gives evidence of an early Allāh cult center 1100 years before Muhammad. And who were the Banā Liyān? According to al-‘abarī the Banā Liyān were the survivors of Jurhum, one of the twelve original Kushite tribes in Mecca. They were a division of the ancient tribe Hudhayl in the northern vicinity of Mecca and al-‘āif, of whom the Encyclopedia of Islam describes: “Their skins were black and shining; their looks…were not hollow but round and teeming.” This was an ancient center of Black worshippers of Allāh that preceded Muhammad in Arabia by over a millennium. The evidence for the cult of Allāh in Arabia, however, does not begin with the Liyānites, as we saw, but goes back to the Proto-Semitic.

II. Ancient Temples of the Black God Allāh

In the 1950’s American archaeologist Wendell Phillips and his team from the American Foundation for the Study of Man (AFSM) excavated the remains of a huge temple complex in Mārib (in today’s Republic of Yemen), which was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Sa#ba. Called today the Awwām Temple, the Sun Temple, and Ma‘eram Bilqīs (Temple of the Queen of Sheba), this excavated complex is the largest temple complex so far discovered in South Arabia and is dedicated to the national god of the ancient Sabaeans, ‘Almaqah. It includes an oval-shaped precinct around 30 feet high, 300 feet long and 250 feet broad. There had once been 32 pillars, each about 4.25 m tall, surrounding a precinct, and there were (are) eight massive columns standing outside of the oval wall (Figure 31). Parts of the complex originated in the 7th century BCE, while others seem to go back to the second millennium BCE (1500-1200 BCE). This huge temple complex shows remarkable architectural skill, as pointed out by international journalist Joël Donnet, who covered the most recent excavations:

474 Ed. de Goeje, Annales, 749.

The engineering required of the ancient builders to erect these eight monoliths – each of them much heavier than 10 tons – is as impressive as that needed to build the biggest monuments of the Ancient Times, such as the Great Pyramid of Giza or the Acropolis in Athens. This explains why Bill Glanzman doesn’t hesitate to call it the “eighth wonder of the world” and the
Yemeni government wishes to have the site included on the UNESCO’s World Heritage List…

Between 1988 and 1997 the German Institute of Archaeology uncovered another temple complex dedicated to the Sabaean deity ‘Almaqah. Called the Barʾān Temple or #Arsh Bilqīs (“The Throne of the Queen of Sheba”), this complex is located in the ancient city of ‘irwāh, which lies 40 kms to the west of the ancient city of Mārib. The Barʾān Temple is conspicuous by the five pillars, the tallest in southern Arabia, that rise from the temple altar (Figure 33). The excavated ruins give evidence of five different building phases, the second oldest of which is radiocarbon dated to the 9th century BCE, which means the temple actually originated some time before that, maybe in the second millennium BCE.

Dr. Bill Glanzman is a professor at the University of Calgary, Canada, and AFSM field director during the last four years.


These two 'Almaqah temples are profoundly important, not just for the religious history of Pre-Qur'ānic Arabia, but also for the development of Islam. The Awwām Temple, for example, evinces “strong currents of continuity between ancient South Arabia and early Islam.” It was no ordinary temple but, like the Ka'ba in Mecca, a Ėaram, a sanctified ‘protected zone’ within which certain things were forbidden and where contending parties could peacefully settle disputes. There was an annual pilgrimage to this 'Almaqah temple, similar to the Muslim Hajj. As shown by William D. Glanzman, archaeologist from the University of Calgary who studied the temple ruins:

The parallels to Islamic sacred places are so strong that we can assert that the origins of many Islamic practices within religious complexes of the Middle East can be found in pre-Islamic times within South Arabia. At the MaĒram Bilqīs that origin extends back in time at least to the late second millennium B.C.

The continuity between these temples and Post-Qur'ānic Islam is not restricted to concepts of sacred space. The name of the god to whom these temples were dedicated is in Epigraphic South Arabian written ʾLMQH. This

name is traditionally vocalized as 'Almaqah or Ilmuqah but, as Julian Baldick reminds us, this is “a purely conventional vocalization” (emphasis added), because the vowels were unsupplied. On the other hand Werner Daum and others, based on more recent data, have now made it clear that we are dealing with two words, the first of which is ʾl, the Proto- and Common Semitic name of ‘God’. In other words these were temples of the Proto-Semitic supreme god, ʿĀlāh. According to Daum the second word of ʾLMQH, mqh, is likely the participle form, muqah, of taqahwa (“to drink”), and thus means ‘The intensively watering one.’ We thus have a name and an epithet: ʿĀlāh Muqah or ʿĀlāh, The Intensively Watering One. This South Arabian ʿĀlāh Muqah is a water-deity that was associated with a well, similar to the resident god of the Barbar Temple in eastern Arabia and AnEnki (=Akkadian ʾl) of Mesopotamia. In ʿĀlāh Muqah’s Barʾān Temple (‘Arsh Bilqīs) there was a ritual well, similar to that found in the Barbar Temple where it is believed to have represented the primordial waters. The deity of the Barbar Temple, just as is the case with the Mesopotamian An-Enki (Akkadian ʾl), was represented by the Bull and ibex. ʿĀlāh Muqah likewise has as his primary attribute animal the Bull. The Awwām Temple, according to an inscription there, was dedicated to ʿĀlāh Muqah Thahwān or ʿĀlāh, The Intensively Watering One, The Bull. He is frequently depicted also as a black ibex with a human face and beard and called sharba, ‘old man.’ This recalls the ibexhuman deity on a fourth millennium BCE seal discussed by Franz Wiggerman and possibly associated by Piotre Michalowski with An-Enki.

ʾAlmaqah Thahwān, Daum has demonstrated, was a black god whose symbols – the black bull/ibex and black rain clouds – connoted his dark appearance.

480 Glanzman, “Who Put the ‘aram’.”
481 Daniel McLaughlin, Yemen (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 2008) 144.
483 By Post-Qur'ānic Islam I mean Islam as it developed after the revelation of the Qur’ān to the Prophet MuĒammad during the 610-632. Pre-Qur’ānic Islam refers to Islam as it existed before this revelation.
485 On ‘A’ as the opening vowel here rather than ‘I’ (i.e. Ilmuqah) see Daum, Ursemitische Religion, 77, 78.
486 On ‘A’ as the opening vowel here rather than ‘I’ (i.e. Ilmuqah) see Daum, Ursemitische Religion, 77, 78.
487 Daum, Ursemitische Religion, 78-80. Beeston (“Saba’,” 664) also connects this term with the root khw meaning something like "fertility," related to the Arabic kahā "flourish.”
490 Rice, Archaeology of the Arabian Gulf, 159; Ministry of Information, Barbar, 7, 13.
491 Wendell Phillips, Qataban and Sheba: Exploring the Ancient Kingdoms on the Biblical Spice Routes of Arabia (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1955) 299; J. Ryckmans, „Notes sur le rôle du tauereau dans la religion sud-arabe,‖ in Mélanges D’Islamologie dédiés à la mémoire de A. Abel par ses collègues, ses élèves et ses amis, Volume II (Brussels: Publication du Centre pour l’Etude des Problèmes du Monde Musulman Contemporain, 1977) 355-373; Jean François Breton, The Barbar Temple/South Arabia/Mesopotamia nexus suggested above is further strengthened by the architecture: both the Babar Temple of East Arabia and the Awwām Temple of South Arabia share the same peculiar oval-shaped wall, which is also found with the very early Sumerian temple complexes such as at al-Ubaid and Khafajah (Figure 34). What is suggested here is that this peculiar sacred architecture and its peculiar resident deity – the supreme Black Bull/Water God – was indigenous to the same people who spread all over Arabia, north and south, then into Mesopotamian and further into India, where the Black Bull/Water God was also supreme, and west into Egypt, bringing there the same deity and possibly architecture.
A reconstruction by Hamilton C. Darby of a Mesopotamian temple (Khafajah) from the early half of the third millennium B.C. excavated by the Iraq expedition of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

While the Bull/Water deity of the Barbar Temple remains for now unnamed, the cognate deity of the South Arabian temples is named ʾAlāḥ and he carries at least two epithets, Muqah and Thahwān, identifying him as the aquatic bull deity. The Mesopotamian Semites also identified the Bull/Water god with ʾAlāḥ, as did the Canaanites.499 It is therefore not surprising that a number of scholars recognize the continuity between this deity and the Qurʾānic/Post-Qurʾānic Allāh. Egerton Sykes suggests that the Islamic Allah “seems to have been preceded by Ilmaqah,”500 and highly influential German historian Ditlef Nielsen, in his 1922 study of the South Arabian pantheon, affirmed:


499 On the very peculiar and “un-Egyptian” oval temple enclosure found in Hierakonpolis in Upper Egypt see Rice, Archaeology of the Arabian Gulf, 169-170.499 See Julian Baldick regarding the Canaanite Il: “It appears that originally El was the real water-god of Canaanite religion, and that the Sea is to be perceived as an emanation from him... It is to be noted that in the myths of Ugarit El is called a bull - an animal who often represents the ‘black god’. Black God, 39.

...the divine father simply bears the name Il “God”... upon whom the entire life of the old Arabians completely depended... The ethical character of this Arabian high god can finally no longer be in dispute... this god still lives on as Allah in the Koran and Islam.501

The attributes of this South Arabian ʾĪ or ʾAlāḥ confirm continuity with the Islamic Allāh. The latter is often invoked as ʾĀlīsh taṣṣal (“God [ʾĀlīsh] Most High”), which was already anticipated in the South Arabic description of ʾĪ as "I #íy ʾAlāḥ Most High.”502 Similarly, the Pre-Qurʾānic motif of the ‘Daughters of Allāh’ – Allāt, al#Uzzā, and al-Manāt – is anticipated in the South Arabic ‘Daughters of ʾĪ,’ Allāt, al#Uzzā and Manāt (?).503: “...the so-called ‘Daughters of Il’... correspond to the ‘Daughters of Allah’ of pre-Islamic Mekka,” Ryckmans informs us.504 There is therefore no doubt that this ancient Arabian ʾĪ or ʾAlāḥ is the same as the Israelite/Biblical ʾĒlōah/ʾĔlōhīm and the Islamic Allāh. All of these are descendent from the Proto-Semitic Black God uncovered by Werner Daum and who is, as Julian Baldick notes, “identical with the supreme or only god of the Semitic speakers: the God of Biblical and Islamic monotheism.”505


503 While it is not clear if Manāt was considered a ‘daughter of ʾĪ’, she is a part of the South Arabian pantheon. See Langdon, Semitic Mythology, 20.

504 See Rice, Archaeology of the Arabian Gulf, 169; Ministry of Information, Barbar, 9.

501 While it is true that it was the going scholarly view that Ilmaqah was a moon god,501 more recent scholarship has abandoned this view because it was based on an
incorrect pretense. The trend, going back to Ditlef Nielsen in the early 20th century,\(^509\) to reduce all of early Arabian religion to a triad of nature deities (Venus, moon, sun) has now been rightly rejected as oversimplifying and unsupported by current data.\(^510\) Regarding ‘Almaqah or ‘Ālīh Muqah, Arabist and historian Alfred F. L. Beeston confirms that “there is nothing to indicate lunar qualities.”\(^511\) Daum agrees:


506 See esp. Robert Morey, The moon-god Allah in the archeology of the Middle East (Newport, PA : Research and Education Foundation, 1994); Yoel Nathan, Moon-theism: Religion of a War and Moon God Prophet, 2 volumes (Lulu.com, 2006)


508 Even Yusuf Abdullah, the president of the General Organization of Antiquities, Museums and Houses of Manuscripts, Yemen, labeled the Awwām Temple the ‘Moon Temple’ on account of this old but mistaken belief.

509 Handbuch der altarabischen Altertumskunde 1 (Copenhagen, 1927) 177-250.


511 According to popular opinion, ‘Almaqah is a moon-god. For this opinion, derived from Mesopotamian parallels, there is no South Arabian proof.\(^512\)

Bill Glanzman, a professor at the University of Calgary, Canada, and American Foundation for the Study of Man field director during the last four years of work at the Awwām or so-called ‘Moon Temple’ rightly rejects this designation.

International journalist Joël Donnet reports:

Almaqah was the main god of the Sabeans…Associated with fertility, agriculture and irrigation, it was first represented by a bull, and possibly by an ibex. It was also often associated with a moon crescent, which led numerous archaeologists - including Abdu Ghaleb and Dr. Yusuf Abdullah, the president of the General Organization of Antiquities, Museums and Houses of Manuscripts- to call it the Moon-God, and therefore to name Mahram Bilqis the Moon Temple. But Bill Glanzman disagrees with this vision, as he considers the moon as only one symbol of Almaqah, and certainly not the most important one, according to the numerous inscriptions from the site recovered during the 1950s and the last four years of the AFMS's fieldwork: "So far, the moon isn't even mentioned in the texts, and we have found only a few examples of Almaqah's crescent moon in artwork. We very commonly find the bull (thawran) associated with Almaqah in the inscriptions (emphasis mine-WM).\(^513\)

512 Daum, Ursemittisch, 30.


The nature of the Sabaean deity ‘Ālīh Muqah was studied in great detail by J. Pirenne\(^514\) and G. Garbini\(^515\) in the 1970s. They demonstrated that the motifs associated with this deity - the bull, the vine, and also the lion's skin on a human statue - are solar rather than lunar attributes. The Bull in fact was associated first with the sun-god, in Mesopotamia and Egypt,\(^516\) only later being conscripted into the service of the moon-deities, in third millennium BCE Mesopotamia.\(^517\) There is thus a growing consensus among scholars that this South Arabian deity was rather a sun-god: “Almaqah was a masculine sun-god,” affirms Jean-François Breton, scholar with the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.\(^518\) So too Jacques Ryckmans:

Until recently Almaqah was considered to be a moon god, under the influence of a now generally rejected conception of a South Arabian pantheon consisting of an exclusive triad: Father


Moon, Mother Sun…and Son Venus. Recent studies underline that the symbols of the bull’s head and the vine motif that are associated with him are solar and Dionysiac attributes and are more consistent with a sun god, a male consort of the sun goddess.\(^519\)

That the moon was only one of ‘Ālīh Muqah’s symbols is a fact Christian polemicists overlook. For example, Joël Nathan, in his tome Moon-o-theism: Religion of a War and Moon God Prophet, quotes the following statement from Wendell Phillip regarding the Awwām Temple that he excavated: “Near the top of the delicate stone shaft is a beautifully covered circular sun with a crescent moon”. When the crescent moon did appear on ‘Ālīh Muqah's temples it was conjoined with the solar orb,
connoting the dual nature of this deity (diurnal=luminous and nocturnal=dark). Yet, Nathan concludes from Phillip and others who point to this solar orb and crescent moon symbol that “this suggests that Almaqah and Syn were moon-gods, not sungods.”

How does a symbol with the sun and moon conjoined indicate a moon-god? Clearly such a conclusion is dogmatic rather than academic, and born no doubt from a desperate desire to make ‘Almaqah a moon-deity for polemical purposes.

III. Nabataeans and the Cult of Allāh

The Pre-Qurʾānic cult of Allāh in northern Afrabia was also not restricted to the Liʾayān. The precursors in northern Afrabia to the Muslim Arabs – ethnically and religiously – were the Nabataeans, an ancient group of Arabs of southern Jordan, Canaan, and northern Arabia. Their origin may have been in southern Arabia, though in both biblical and Islamic tradition they are considered descendents of Ishmael of northern provenance. In the same sources the Nabataeans are ‘brothers’ of the black Qedar Arabs, Nabīt and Qēḍār appearing as the eldest sons of Ishmael. On the other hand, Ernst Axel Knauf argues that the Nabataean’s actually emerged out of the Qedar tribe. They first explicitly appear in history maybe in Assyrian records of the eighth century BCE in the area of Iraq and later in 312 BCE in Syria-Palestine. The Romans annexed the Nabataean kingdom in the second century CE.

Like the Qedar, the Nabataeans were a black tribe. The anonymous Akhbār al-zamān (11th cent) lists the Nabataeans among the descendents of Canaan (son of Ham) and claims “Nabiā signifies ‘Black’.” Al-Dimashqī (13th century) too, in his Kūṭāb nukhbat al-dahr fi iṭāb ib albarr wa l-baʾār, lists the Nabataeans along with the Copts, BrBr (Berbers) and Sādān (Blacks from Africa) as descendants of Black Ham. Anthropologist Dana Marniche explains:

The word Nabataean…its meaning (had) originally nothing to do with blackness, however, due to the African appearance of the Nabataeans…the word came to signify black. Certain bedouin clans of the Nabataean regions like Petra, Wādī Rum and other areas of Jordan such as the Huwát’…who claim descent from the Nabataeans, are still near black in color.

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In his study of Nabataean religion John Healy remarks: “features of Nabataean religion…seem to prefigure religious ideas which became much more prominent in Islam.” No doubt, the cult of Allāh in Mecca (Pre- and Post-Qurʾānic) is in many ways a continuation or at least a cognate of the cult of Petra, the Nabataean capital. The Nabataeans were not simple ‘polytheists’ but honored a ‘dyotheistic pair,’ a supreme male god and his female partner. All other deities were subordinate. Inscriptional evidence makes it clear that the male god was the paramount deity of the Nabataeans.

Who is this supreme deity? He is called in inscriptions Dhu l-Šarā (دو l-شرا), but this is no divine name, only a place name (toponym), an epithet meaning “He who is of the Sharā (mountains),” the mountain range around Petra and the ancient mountain homelands of the Biblical Edomites and the domain of Yahweh (Num 33:42-43). Toponyms are common in ancient Semitic tradition, and these frequently replace and disguise the true name of the deity. In this situation “scholars have been much concerned with trying to find the true name of this supreme god.”

It has been suggested that the name of the god is Ruʾā, or even Aʿrā, but the arguments in support of these are weak. Rather, “it is most likely that Dushara is referred to simply as ‘ɪ, ‘the god’ par excellence.” In other words, as F.V. Winnet pointed out, “the Nabataean word for ‘God’ is Allāḥ,” for “Allāḥ…enters into the composition of numerous personal names among the Nabataeans.” While theophorous names compounded with the name Dhu l-Šarā are rare, names compounded with Allāḥ predominate, such as Yahballāḥ, “Allah has given” and Itllāḥ, “Allah is.” The supreme god of these Black north Africans was therefore Allāḥ and his female complement was Allāt, also called al-Uzza.
What are the natures of these deities, the Nabataean Aīhā (Dhu ʾl-Sharā) and Allāt? They were clearly anthropomorphic, worshipped in both aniconic and iconic (anthropomorphic) form. While it is true that the iconic conventions were imported from the Hellenistic tradition and the anthropomorphic statues represent an interpretatio graeca, this amounted only to a Greek veneer on a Semitic anthropomorphic tradition. The Nabataean’s iconic Aīhā (Dhu ʾl-Sharā) was, as well said by Nelson Glueck, a “Hellenized, Oriental deity.”

The irresistible Hellenism of their era affected all forms of selfexpression and was modified in turn by their own enduring Orientalism. Most of the gods and goddesses of their (the Nabataeans) maturity seem at first glance to have been modeled completely after those of Greece, but closer examination reveals fundamental characteristics that are unquestionably Semitic…They chose…to fashion their gods primarily in accord with their traditional loyalties and religious convictions and the dictates of their origins and environment, however much they responded to cultural factors and examples of non-Semitic sources. They preferred their familiar gods, altered as they may have been by Hellenistic influences…(emphasis mine-WM) of All āt…”. See further Iain Browning, Petra (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973) 45; Nielsen, Dreieinigen Gott, I: 321. Cf. Restō, Arabs in Antiquity, 604, who disagrees, but his reasons are unconvincing.

Contra Healey, Religion of the Nabataeans, 187.


In other words, even though the later statues reflected Hellenistic conventions, the anthropomorphic deity himself was authentically Semitic. The Nabataean Aīhā (Dhu ʾl-Sharā) was, like his predecessors, both a solar and aquatic deity. He had two attribute animals: an eagle with outstretched wings indicating his solar character and a bull signaling his chthonic/aquatic nature. While his temples had a solar orientation, they were also located by streams. These dual attributes (eagle/bull) indicate that, like the Āhā Muqāh of South Arabia, An-Enki of Mesopotamia and Raḥ of Egypt, the Nabataean Aīhā (Dhu ʾl-Sharā) is the Coniunctio oppositorum. Before the Nabataeans embraced the Hellenistic convention of depicting their deities in fully anthropomorphic statues, they represented Aīhā (Dhu ʾl-Sharā) in a black, rectangular stone, a baetyl (from bēt ʾēl, ‘house-of-God’) which was regarded as “the container of the god.” Allāt/āl#Uzzā was “the deity of springs and of water as befits a fertility goddess”. She was the “Mother of the gods,” even the mother of Aīhā (Dhu ʾl-Sharā).
Aspects of the Nabataean myth of Aīhāh and Allāt are revealed in the actia dusaria or the festivals held in his honor at Petra. According to the 4th century CE Christian writer Epiphanius (Contra Haeres., LI, 22, 9-12), bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, the Nabataeans celebrated on the sixth of January a feast in honor of the birth of Aīhāh (Dhu 'l-Sharā) to the virgin Xaťbū, kaabū. The name Epiphanius gives to the virgin has been associated with the Arabic ka#ba, “cube,” (from the Arabic ku#ba, ka#iba). He says these festivals took place in Petra, Elusa and Alexandria. Epiphanius gives details regarding the Alexandrian festival but indicates that the festival in Petra took place similarly. There was a pilgrimage to his Petra temple to celebrate Aīhāh’s (Dhu 'l-Sharā’s) birth, which was believed to have occurred on December 25, the time of the winter solstice. In this festival celebrating the virgin begetting the god, the image of a babe was brought out of the temple sanctuary and greeted by the worshippers with loud acclamations of ‘the virgin has begotten’. The image of the god/babe is carried around the sanctuary seven times, and then returned to its place buried in the ground. Jan Restö summarizes the myth no doubt associated with these two deities:

555  Browning, Petra, 47. See also Gheuck, Deities and Dolphins, 381-392. She was thus identified with the Greek goddess Aphrodite, who was born from the sea. See Restö, Arabs in Antiquity,

556  Langdon, Semitic Mythology, 17.

557  Healey, Religion of the Nabataeans, 105.

558  Correction from Xααμου; R. Eisler, ARW 1 (1912): 630; El² 2246 s.v. Dhu ‘l-Sharā by G. Ryckmans; Langdon, Semitic Mythology, 16.

559  El² 2247 s.v. Dhu ‘l-Sharā by G. Ryckmans; El¹ 4586 s.v. Ka#ba by A.J. Wensinck; Langdon, Semitic Mythology, 16.

560  Langdon, Semitic Mythology, 18; Healey, Religion of the Nabataeans, 103. He says explicitly, after describing the Alexandrian festival, “This also takes place in the same idolatrous manner in Petra” (51:22).

561  Langdon, Semitic Mythology, 16.

The cult of the young goddess giving birth to a divine child manifest as the morning star is part of a complex of religious ideas current in the eastern Mediterranean in antiquity. Isaac of Antioch describes how women belonging to the ‘sons of Hagar’ (i.e. Arabs) worship ‘the star,’ kawkabtā. We also hear how the Saracen in Elusa worship Lucifer, Venus’ son. According to Hieronymus, in Hebrew he is called Chocab which means ‘star.’ His name is a Latin translation of the Greek phōosphoros, ‘lightcarrier’…A god manifest in the morning star is well documented in ancient epigraphic monuments, in Latin by the name bonus puer phosphorus, ‘the good lad, the light-carrier’. This makes it likely that Isaac of Antioch also refers to a cult of a new-born child manifest in the morning star. The star, kawkabtā, would thus be the male god, Dusares/Dioysus/Phosphoros/Eōosphoros/Lucifer, not the female (#Uzzā)/Aphrodite. The feminine form of the word belongs to Syriac grammar, not to Arabian mythology. Contrary to what was assumed by earlier scholarship, it has become clear that there is no definite evidence for an identification between the morning star and the female god of Arabia.

A ìhāh (Dhu ‘l-Sharā) of the Nabataeans was a solar/astral deity born of the virgin ‘night’, a metaphor for the feminized, dark aquatic matter of the pre-cosmic world. According to Restö “This mythology and cult can be traced far back in Semitic religion. This Petra cult remarkably parallels the later Meccan cult: Aīhāh and Allāt, the feminized ka#ba, black stone, and sevenfold circumambulation all prefigure these aspects of the Aīhāh cult in Mecca. There may be some relation between the Nabataeans of Petra and the Quraysh of Mecca. Elements of this cult – the bull/aquatic and eagle/solar symbolism, the feminine complement that has aquatic associations and is associated with the ‘house’ of the male deity, the black stone, a myth of the god born from his aquatic mother/spouse – can all now be understood in the context of the ‘new religion’ from Epipaleolithic/Neolithic Levant.

562  Restö, Arabs in Antiquity, 605.

563  Restö, Arabs in Antiquity, 606.

564  All b. Abbābîh reportedly claimed that the Quraysh were Nabataeans, and Ibūn Māniār, Lisān s.v.  =$\ddot{\mathfrak{m}}$ Arabic quotes Ibūn #Abba as saying “the Quraysh were Nabāt from Kutha in Iraq.” See also Arābarī, Tārīkh, 1314 who reports: “And out of Nabīt and Qaydar God propagated the Arabs.” Further D.S. Margoliouth, Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 2nd edition [New York and London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1905] 10.

Chapter Five Islam Before Muḥammad

“Islam, as an organized religion, had its origin in the Arabian desert…Without begging the question by asserting that Islam is older than Muhammad, consider that such a posture has been taken by all religions when assailed for having a place and time of origin…Islam had such a beginning; in fact, as we know it, Islam began with Muhammad” Molefi Kete Asanti, Afrocentricity [1988] I. From Petra to Mecca: The Pre-Qur’anic Cult of the Ka#ba

Religion in Afrabia, particularly in Mecca prior to Muḥammad’s seventh century CE movement, is frequently characterized as barbarous, idolatrous, and polytheistic, all connoted by the Arabic term Jāhilī, “ignorant,” which Muslim writers use to
describe the Arabs’ pre-Qur’ānic spiritual state. More recent critical scholarship has demonstrated that this characterization is inadequate and, indeed, inaccurate. It is true that mention is made in seventh century BCE Assyrian inscriptions of idols of six “gods of the Arabs” that are captured by Sennacherib in Dumah (NW Arabia). But neither the multiple deities nor their idols confirm the popular (Islamic) characterization. Javier Teixidor, studying hundreds of ancient Near Eastern Semitic inscriptions from the first millennium BCE, has documented a ‘Pagan monotheism’ in Afrabia. According to Teixidor, there was no indiscriminative polytheism. Rather there was the belief in one supreme god, ‘1, with whom other deities were subordinate associated. At least some of these lesser deities were apparently members of I’s divine assembly. Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BCE, knew the Arabs to venerate only two supreme deities, a male and a female (III, 8). Origen, the Christian apologist and church father of the 2nd – 3rd centuries BCE, in his Contra Celsum (5.37) likewise noted that Arabs worshipped this duo, “for in them the male and female are glorified.” From the inscriptions it is clear that these male and female deities of the ancient Arabs were Aīfāh and Allāt.

These male and female deities of the Arab cult during this period were worshipped through a sacred stone, called a baetyl (in Arabic nūthūb), a term derived from the West Semitic bêt ‘ēl, “house-of-God”. This designation indicates that the stone itself was not the object of veneration but was instead “the residence of the god-or, rather…the place in which the god was embodied.”

Clement of Alexandria in the second century CE knew the Arabs to venerate their god through a stone (Protreptika, IV, 46, 1) as did his contemporary Maximus Tyrius (Sermon 38). It is during this same period (second century) that we get evidence of the existence of the cubic Meccan temple, the Ka#ba, in which the cubic stone was undoubtedly located. Ptolemy (Geography vi. 7) writes in place of Mecca ‘Macoraba,’ which is likely rooted in the South Semitic mikrāb, “temple.” “From this,” Semitic scholar Ardent J. Wensinck informs us, “one may conclude that the Ka#ba already existed in the second century A.D.”

There is evidence that it existed centuries earlier. Greek historian of the first century BCE, Diodorus Siculus, alluded to the Ka#ba, noting that it was “exceedingly revered by all Arabs.” The stone and cubed temple were not peculiar to the Arabs, but were an authentic characteristic of Semitic worship.

Abstract representations of deity in the form of a square or cube was common throughout the (Pre-Hellenic) Semitic Near East…This was the baetyl, or stone cult object, the focal point of so many temples not subject to Classicising influences…Indeed, the ancient Semitic idea of the sacred cube reaches culmination in the center of Semitic worship today: the Ka#ba…at Mecca.

Wensinck pointed out that the Meccan shrine “possessed in a high degree the usual qualities of a Semitic sanctuary.” The stone was frequently a black stone (Figure 35), and Hildegard Lewy’s important study of the ancient cults of Jerusalem and Mecca enlightens us as to why this was so. According to Lewy, an ancient Semitic tradition – out of which the cults of Jerusalem and Mecca evolved – centered on a black stone that was at the same time considered an embodiment of the nether waters and a piece of the body of a deity, the body being made from those waters. This stone, through which the deity was worshipped, was housed in a cubed temple or shrine covered in black curtains. The ‘blackness’ of this deity and his cult inspired associations with the astral deity Saturn, the ‘Black Planet,’ whose temple was made of black stone, draped with black curtains, and featured a black stone representing the deity or an anthropomorphic statue of the deity made from black stone. Both al-Mas#ådi (d. 956) and al-Dimasqî (d. 1327) report identifications of the Meccan Ka#ba with the cult of the black deity Saturn, as did the Dabistān –i Mazzhib. But it is no doubt the black deity of ancient Afrabia to which the Meccan cult was dedicated. The shrine and stone confirm this.

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565 See Restō, Arabs, 601.
568 Trans. H. Chadwick (Cambridge: University Press, 1965) 294. Strabo in the first century CE (Geography, XVI, 1, 11) and Arrian in the second century CE (Anabasis, VII, 20) report that the Arabs venerate two deities, but both male. This is clearly an error, no doubt based on linguistics.
570 Wensinck pointed out that the Meccan shrine “possessed in a high degree the usual qualities of a Semitic sanctuary.” The stone was frequently a black stone (Figure 35), and Hildegard Lewy’s important study of the ancient cults of Jerusalem and Mecca enlightens us as to why this was so. According to Lewy, an ancient Semitic tradition – out of which the cults of Jerusalem and Mecca evolved – centered on a black stone that was at the same time considered an embodiment of the nether waters and a piece of the body of a deity, the body being made from those waters. This stone, through which the deity was worshipped, was housed in a cubed temple or shrine covered in black curtains. The ‘blackness’ of this deity and his cult inspired associations with the astral deity Saturn, the ‘Black Planet,’ whose temple was made of black stone, draped with black curtains, and featured a black stone representing the deity or an anthropomorphic statue of the deity made from black stone. Both al-Mas#ådi (d. 956) and al-Dimasqî (d. 1327) report identifications of the Meccan Ka#ba with the cult of the black deity Saturn, as did the Dabistān –i Mazzhib. But it is no doubt the black deity of ancient Afrabia to which the Meccan cult was dedicated. The shrine and stone confirm this.
571 E1 4:586 s.v. Ka#ba by A.J. Wensinck. Walter Williams’ comment is therefore nonsensical: “If Mecca is supposed to be the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad (570 ACE), thereby, making Mecca a supposed Holy City, I ask the question again, why was Mecca called Macoraba during the Byzantine era and not called Mecca?” Historical Origin, 94. In point of fact, Macoraba was not a general Byzantine designation, but that of Ptolemy and his use of this term actually supports the existence of the city and its shrine, not cast doubt on it.
572 His full quote is: “And a temple has been set-up there, which is very holy and exceedingly revered by all Arabs.” Bibliotheca historica, trans. C H Oliphant in Diodorus Of Sicily (London: William Heinemann Ltd., & Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1935) II: 217. Tisdail appropriately suggests that “The Ka#bah is, in all probability, the spot referred to by Diodorus Siculus”: Original Sources, 34. Warwick Ball, Rome in the East: the transformation of an empire (Routledge, 2000) 379-380.
573 E1 4:591 s.v. Ka#ba by A.J. Wensinck.
The baetyl of Aphrodite from Palaepaphos,
Cyrus

The Babylonians called Saturn Mi “The Black”. See Robert Brown, The Great Dionysiac Myth (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1878) 329. According to the Dabistán-i Mazzhib or “Schools of Religions” Saturn’s temple was constructed out of black stone as was his statue that stood there. In addition, Saturn’s officiating ministers were all black complected persons, Ethiopians, etc. The Dabistán or School of Manners, trans. David Shea and Anthony Troyer (New York and London: M. Walter Dunne, 1901) 22.

577 Murå578 Kitåb Nukhbat

The Shrine: The Ka#ba was originally enigmatically built in a wadi, the baãn Makka. As such, “The story of the Ka#ba is a story of devastating floods.”580 Knowing the destructive impact of the flooding, why would the Afrabians choose a wadi for the site of their holiest shrine? Werner Daum’s evidence suggests the answer: “The Ka#ba is one of the sanctuaries of the ancient Arabian water and fertility religion,” i.e. the religion of the ancient Afrabian Black God.581 Within the shrine was apparently a sacred well whose waters were associated with the primordial waters of the netherworld.582

The Ka#ba in Mecca has two peculiar, seemingly mutually exclusive characteristics: on the one hand it was known as baytullah or ‘House of Allah,” but on the other hand it was consistently – from pre- to post-Qur’anic times – feminized.583 The shrine is dressed as a ‘bride’ and even popularly addressed in Mecca as al-bunayya, “the little girl.” Not understanding these two characteristics in their right context – the context of the ancient Afrabian religion of the Black God – has created much confusion and spawned much misinformation. It is not the case that the Ka#ba cult was centered on the worship of a goddess who was later replaced by pathetically patriarchal Muslims with a male god, Allah.584 The masculine and feminine aspects of the cult were always there. As Robert Eisler explains in his

584 E.g. Oak, World Vedic Heritage, 1696.

The house is a feminine deity, or…the feminine deity is called the habitation, dwelling (of a masculine god)…This explanation…can be applied to the Ka#aba. Because inside of her, the holy stone of the moon-god Hubat585 was erected…As far as Arabia, Syria and the Euphrates countries are concerned, we do have a row of direct testimonies for the independent cult of the holy house, as explained above by Hommel in the sense of ‘Astarte = Ašritu = ‘house, temple, dwelling’…Thus, we read in a list of pagan-Arabic cults by Abu l’Farad: “The Himyarites worshipped Šams, the sun, the Beni Kinanah the moon, the tribes Tašm the star Al Debaran, the Lakhm and Dshorhom the planet Jupiter, the Tay the Canobos-, the Kays the Sirius star, the Asad the Mercury, and the Takiff a small temple in the upper part of Mahlak, which ones calls Allât.” The expression is quite plain and says in clear words that the small tribal temple, the baitan itself was called ʾl-Lât, ‘the goddess’…586
Hubal was the leading male idol of the Jāhilī Arabs of Mecca and was prominently placed in the Ka#ba. Robert Eisler, Weltenmantel und Himmelszelt; religionsgeschichtliche untersuchungen zur urgeschichte des antiken weltbildes, two volumes (Munchen: C. H. Beck, 1909 -1910) I: 120-121, 162.

We have already discussed the significance of the feminization of the square temple of the male deity: the square temple or ‘house’ represents the imminent material body of the male god, a body composed of the black, aquatic primordial matter that is personified as a goddess. The temple, itself called Allṣṭ the goddess, is baytullah, the house of AĪĀh, for in it/her he sits enthroned. In other words, the scene of the male god enthroned within a square or rectangular shrine is a symbolic picture of his incarnation within a black body. This is confirmed by the presence of the black stone and its central role in the cult.

Al-Hajar al-Aswad: The black stone of the Meccan Ka#ba, Levy has well argued, must be understood against the backdrop of the broader Semitic cult of stones: “the Black Stone…was thought to be…a part of the body of a great god…(I)n the form of a black meteorite a piece of the deity’s astral body was visible to the congregation at all times…” This stone was associated with water, so we should think of an aquatic divine body. While the shrine is feminized and therefore identified with the goddess, the stone inside the shrine is identified with the male god, AĪĀh. This point is explicitly made in a Muslim tradition according to which al-Zubayr was digging in al`ijr while rebuilding the Ka#ba and found a stone on which was written: innṣnÊ AĪĀh Dhå Bakka, “I am AĪĀh, Lord of Bekka.”


Al-AzraqÊ, Kit§b Akhb§r Makka, apud Die Chroniken der Stadt Mecca, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1858-61) 42-3; •abarÊ, TafsÊr (Cairo ed.) III:61.

The relation of the blackness of the stone and the blackness of the deity is suggested, if not confirmed, by the tradition of the warrior Khālid b. al-Walīd (d. 642), who was dispatched by MuĒammad to destroy the shrine of the goddess al#Uzz§. Al#Uzz§, “the Mighty One,” whose cult was based in Nakhlah, east of Mecca towards al`if, was the greatest idol among the Quraysh, MuĒammad’s tribe. She was joined with Allṣṭ and alManṣṭ, and the three were considered by the Meccans to be the ‘daughters of AĪĀh.’ Al#Uzz§ was worshipped through a black cubic stone and three sacred trees. When Khālid arrived in
Nakhlah at the goddess’s shrine, one of her priests was outside. Suddenly a black woman with disheveled hair emerged from the shrine, and the priest yelled to her: “O al#Uzz§, be courageous.” Khalid is said to have shook with terror, then composed himself and severed the woman’s head. After reporting his deed to MuÈammad the later said: “That (i.e. the Black woman) was al#Uzz§. But she is no more.” Al#Uzz§, the ‘daughter’ and likely ‘spouse’ of Allâh was thus viewed as a Black woman, represented by a black stone. When we consider that the three ‘daughters’ of a male deity reflect the nature of that deity himself, this conception of a black al#Uzz§ shines some light on the popular conception of Allâh.

From the old Arabian religion, Islam has canonized a festival, a sanctuary, and a god. In the great annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the old pagan main festival of Mecca, with its holy stone, is still living on. Still today it is the holy place of all Muhammedans. And the old Arabic main-god is still existing as the Allah of Islam. In the Koran he is still mentioned as the old main-god. And this pre-Islamic Allah we do get to know now better through the inscriptions. He bears the same name as in the Koran.”

The worship of A ÏÏāh, centered on a black stone and associated with a cubic shrine, Ka#ba, was a part of Afrabian religion long before the birth of MuÈammad b. #Abd Allâh in sixth century Arabia. We find it in Pertra and in Mecca. Joseph Henninger has described pre-Qurʾanic religion in Mecca on the eve of MuÈammad accordingly:

Here then are the elements of this religion: Allah, creator of the world, supreme and undisputed lord, but relegated to the background in the cultic and practical life of the people; next, manifesting the rudiments of a polytheism, several astral divinities… and atmospheric divinities… finally, ancestors and jinn, these last having more importance in the belief system than in the cult (emphasis original).

The ‘pagan monotheism’ that characterized Semitic religion in Arabia at least since the first millennium BCE grew increasing vague, particularly in Mecca on the eve of the Prophet. While Allâh was still recognized as the supreme creator god and the other deities considered his subordinates, the latter became increasing important in the life of the Meccans and Allâh increasing irrelevant. ‘Associationism’ rather than straight ‘polytheism’ was the theological scandal from the Qurʾan’s perspective. Allâh’s different attributes had been personified and exalted, and relied upon in the place of the god himself or ‘associated’ with him in prayers. This was the situation that MuÈammad found and eventually set out to correct (though he was not the first). As J. Waardenburg explains:

It was deviant believers or mushrikån (‘associators’) who had substituted for the cult of the supreme god particular cults of his names and attributes as independent entities, as ‘daughters of Allah’ or as other deities.

The nature of Arabian religion before MuÈammad’s reform movement is demonstrated most admirably in two studies of the pre-Qurʾanic talbiyät (sing. talbiya) or formulaic ritual invocations by S.M. Usain and M.J. Kister. The talbiya is the invocation/prayer made by Hajj pilgrims to the Ka#ba. The current Muslim talbiya is as follows:

Here I am at Thy service O A ÏÏāh, here I am. Here I am at Thy service and Thou hast no partners. Thine alone is All Praise and All Bounty, and Thine alone is The Sovereignty. Thou hast no partners.

But the ‘pagan’ tribes before the time of MuÈammad who made the pilgrimage uttered a similar version of this talbiya:

Here I am at Thy service O A ÏÏāh, here I am. Here I am at Thy service and Thou hast no partners except such partner as thou hast; Thou possesseth him and all that is his.

MuÈammad adapted his talbiya from that of the pagan’s, particularly the talbiya of the Banu Ash#ariyyån, monotheizing it. These pre-Qurʾanic talbiyät shine significant light on the religion of the tribes to whom the Prophet preached. While each tribe had its idol which it associated with Allâh, they still acknowledged Allâh’s supremacy over their tribal idol. The Qays #Ayl§n, e.g., confessed in its talbiya to be with its idols in humble submission to al-Rahmân, the Merciful. The Banå Thaqīf asked Allâh for forgiveness of sins and confessed that their goddesses, All$t and al#Uzz§, were in Allâh’s hands and yielded obediently to him.

Kister describes:


This concept of a Black al#Uzz§ shines some light on the popular conception of Allâh.
accepting and admitting the existence and supreme authority of God, they associated other deities with Him.”

Particularly important is the talbiya of the Banā’ imyar, the Black tribe. They stress therein that they address Allāh on behalf of their kings who are pious and stay away from sin due to Islam (tanazzuh an wa-islām)! Here the word islām likely means “exclusive devotion to one god (Allāh).” In other words, the pre-Qur’ānic tribal worship of Allāh was even called Islam, at least by some of the tribes.

It is acknowledged by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars that Muḥammad was no innovator: practically the whole religious system associated with him is a carry-over from the ‘pagan’ religion, or better ‘Kushite’ religion, of the pre-Qur’ānic period. Abā al-Fidā’, in his Tawarikh al-Qadimah (p. 180), confirms for example:


The Arabs of the time of ignorance used to do things which the Sharia (Islamic revelation) has adopted …they…used to make Pilgrimage (Hajj) to the House (the Ka’ba) and visit the consecrated places, and wear the Ihram and perform the awf (circumambulation around the Ka’ba), and run (between the hills Al’afā and al-Marwah) and take their stand at all the Stations, and cast the stones…at the devil in the valley of Mina…That the pre-Qur’ānic religion of Mecca included the Hajj (pilgrimage) is well documented, notwithstanding the ridiculous and undocumented (and undocumentable) claim of Walter Williams that “It was Ibn Al-‘Arabi (in the 13th century CE) who first created the ritual of going on a Hajj to Mecca, an imaginary mental state.”600 As Jacques Ryckmans informs us, the details of the Islamic pilgrimage ritual were observed in the period before Muḥammad:

Throughout pre-Islāmic Arabia, ‘truces of God’ allowed people to attend in security the yearly pilgrimages to important shrines. The rites included purifications and the wearing of ritual clothing, sexual abstinence, abstention from shedding blood, and circuits performed (awf, dawār) around the sacred object; they were concluded by the slaughter of animals, which were eaten in collective feasts. Today such practices still form the core of the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. The classical, Nabataean, Liyānite, and Sabaean sources mention pilgrimages.601 Even the details of ritual purity, so characteristic of Islamic ritual practice, is a carry-over.


South Arabian texts confessing offenses against ritual cleanliness, along with data from classical sources and the Muslim tradition on pre-Islamic customs, contribute to outline an ancient Arabian code of ritual cleanliness similar to that of the Leviticus and of Muslim jurisprudence, although some Islamologists, unaware of the pre-Islamic Arabian epigraphic material, have attributed the Muslim code on ritual cleanliness (āahārah) to a Jewish influence on early Islam in Medina.602 Thus W. St. Clair Tisdall rightly concluded:

Not only in reference to Allah Ta’ala and to reverence for the Black Stone and the Ka’bah but in many other matters also Islam has borrowed from the Arabs of more ancient times. It is not too much to say that most of the religious rites and ceremonies which now prevail throughout the Muhammad world are identical with those practiced in Arabia from immemorial antiquity.603

Muḥammad’s therefore was a not a ‘new religious movement’ but a reform movement.604 His intent was to rid the ancient cult of Allāh, already called ‘Islam’ in some instances,605 of the innovations that foreigners had introduced into it. As Cheikh Anta Diop confirms, Muḥammad’s movement was a reformed continuation of the ancient Afrabian (Kushite) religion:

602 Ibid.
603 W. St. Clair Tisdall, The Original Sources of the Qur’an (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1911) 43.
604 Jacques Waardenburg, “Towards a Periodization of Earliest Islam According to its Relations with Other Religions,” in Proceedings of the ninth congress of the Union européenne des arabists et islamistes, Amsterdam, 1st to 7th September 1978 (Leiden: Brill, 1981) 304-326, esp. 308, 313 acknowledges Muḥammad’s early movement as being originally a Meccan religious purification movement against idolatry and a reform movement with regard to the ahl al-kalīm, that is Jews and Christians.
605 D.S. Margoliouth confirms regarding the name ‘Muslim’ that “it may be said with pracitc certainty that (the name) existed with religious value before Mohammed’s time” and that “the word (Islam) was known (already) to the Prophet…and some other persons…in the sense of monotheist.” “On the Origins and Import of the names Muslim and ‘anīf,” JRAS 35 (1903): 470, 476.

The religion (of ancient Arabia) was of Kushite origin…It would remain the same until the advent of Islam…all of the elements necessary for the blossoming of Islam were in place more than 1,000 years before the birth of Mohammed. Islam would appear as a purification of Sabaeanism by the ‘Messenger of God’.606

It thus cannot be said that Muḥammad introduced a new religion, Islam, onto the Arabian scene. Philip Hitti said it best: “Islam…in its original form is the logical perfection of Semitic religion.”607 So too did Frederick Max Müller, founder of the discipline of comparative religions, correctly perceive the situation and report in his study of “Semite Monotheism”:

Mohammedanism…is a Semitic religion, and its very core is monotheism. But did Mohammed invent monotheism? Did he
IV. Muḥammad and the Reformation of Islam

We have every reason to believe that the cult of the Ka#ba had the same significance for the prophet Muḥammad that it did prior, minus the excessive idolatry: it was the cult center of the Black God, Allāh. As Lewy well argues in her study of the cult of the Black God in Mecca and Jerusalem:

Diop, African Origin, 126, 127.

The Black Stone...was thought to be...a part of the body of a great god...In the form of a black meteorite a piece of the deity's astral body was visible to the congregation at all times...It was...no break with the ancient religion of Mecca when Muḥammad...set up the Hajar al-aswad in a place where it was accessible to the eyes and the lips of the worshipers...It is...pertinent to recall that, before designating...the Ka#ba as the qibla...Muḥammad ordered his followers to turn their faces in prayer toward the sacred rock in Jerusalem. The significance of this command becomes apparent if it is kept in mind that the qibla is an outgrowth of the belief...that man can address his prayers only to a being visible to the eyes...when praying...the worshipper turned his eyes either to the heavenly body itself or, in its absence, to the stone or statue representing it on earth. If, however, he was not present in the town where a sacred stone, assumed to be a part of the deity's astral body, was visible to the congregation, he still turned his eyes in the direction of this sanctuary, it being supposed that, having visited and inspected the deity's body on the occasion of the annual pilgrimage, he could visualize it and thus address his prayer to it even from a distant point or locality.

Muḥammad's reported interaction with Al-Hajar al-Aswad or the Black Stone is equally suggestive. He is known to have circumambulated the Ka#ba on camelback while pointing to the Black Stone with a staff exclaiming, Allāh Akbar (Allāh is the greatest). He was observing touching the stone with a stick and then kissing the stick. According to #Abd Allāh b. #Umar, son of the second caliph, Muḥammad would touch the Black Stone, kiss it, and weep for a long time. He reportedly said to #Umar “O #Umar, this is the place where one should shed tears.” It is not made clear why interacting with the Black Stone was a source of such sadness, but that the Prophet made some intimate, deeply emotional association between the stone and Allāh is quite evident from these reports. In this regard, a famous hadith of the Prophet is relevant: “The Ka#ba (stone) is the Right Hand of Allāh and with it He shakes the hands of His servants as a man shakes the hand of His friend.” “Right Hand” here seems to be synecdoche (a part of something standing for the whole). In the history of religious symbolism the Hand symbolized a transmitter of spiritual and physical energy. This is an apt description of the secondary black body that the creator-god made for himself in order to be able to transmit his divine luminosity to earth without scorching it. That the Black Stone as Right Hand of Allāh actually represents Allāh himself is further suggested by some Nabatean remains. At the Qaṣr el-Bint temple at Petra dedicated to Allāh (Dhu 'l-Sharārā) there has been found in the adyton (sanctuary) a representation of the god as a marble hand.

We are here reminded of the famous “ādīth of Jibrīl” in which Muḥammad defines iṣṣn as “to worship God as though you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, then indeed He sees you.”


The Black Stone is situated in the southeast corner of the Ka#ba precisely facing the winter sunrise, where the sun is reborn. This brings to mind the Nabataean ritual in which the birth of the solar/aquatic deity Allāh (Dhu 'l-Sharārā), represented by a black stone, was celebrated at the Ka#ba in Petra with rituals similar to those associated with the Meccan (Islamic) Black Stone, such as the seven circumambulations. In the Petra ritual, Epiphanius suggests, Allāh (Dhu 'l-Sharārā) is portrayed as a babe, the new born sun/son of the virgin. In the light of this we cannot help but notice that the silver casing enclosure of the Black Stone at the Meccan Ka#ba is in the shape of a woman's dilated vulva and the stone itself resembles the crown of the newborn Black God (Figure 37)! To be sure, this silver casing that strikes us so much like a dilated vulva was not in existence in Muḥammad's time. It was the anti-caliph #Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr (d.692) who first encircled the stone with silver rings, subsequent caliphs providing the frame. Yet this visual recall of the ancient Semitic motif of the black mother giving birth to the black god is astonishing and highlights the words quoted above of Warwick Ball: “the ancient Semitic idea of the sacred cube reaches culmination in the center of Semitic worship today: the Ka#ba...at Mecca.”
The monotheistic revolt against Arabian idolatry and ‘associationism’ did not begin in the seventh century with Muḥammad. A number of 4th-5th century CE inscriptions evidence a radical religious change in South Arabia: ‘associationism’ gives way to a monotheism focused on a deity called simply Raʾmān, “the Merciful.” This pre-Qurʾānic Arabian monotheism seems to be of neither Jewish nor Christian origin. The Orthodox Christian Sozomenos (wrt. ca. 443-450), who was aware of the fact that the Arabs first observed the same monotheistic customs as the pre-Mosaic ancient Hebrews but over time succumbed to the idolatry of their neighbors, reported that some northern Arabs at his time also rejected this idolatry and returned to the monotheistic way of life. Patricia Crone recognized the implications of this report for Islamic tradition:

616 Ball, Rome in the East 379-380.

What Sozomen’s information adds up to is that by the fifth century the Arabs themselves had become familiar with the idea that they were Abrahamic monotheists by origin, at least in the Gaza area (a Qurash matjar), and that some of them reacted by becoming what the Islamic tradition describes as Ḥanīfīs.

The Ḥanīfī (sing. Ḥanīf) were individuals spread out in the urban areas - Mecca, Yahtrīb (Medina), al-ʿāʾif, etc. - who adhered to a non-idolatrous monotheism, called Ḥanīfiyya, long before Muḥammad emerged on the scene. As Tisdall noted:

Muhammad was by no means the first of his nation who became convinced of the folly and worthlessness of the popular religion of the Arabs of the time, and desired to effect reform. Some years before his appearance as a prophet…a number of men arose in Medina, ʿāʾif, and Mecca…who rejected the idol worship and polytheism of the people at large…the men of whom we speak determined to restore the worship of God Most High (Allāh Taʾāla) to its proper place by abolishing, not only the

619 Ecclesiastical History, 299.
The Ėunafāʾ rejected idolatry, abstained from wine and foods sacrificed to gods other than Aʿūlāh, made ablution (ritual purification), and avoided menstruating women. The existence of these Arab monotheists before Muḥammad is certain. Some of these ‘Aḥāhalone’ worshippers, like the ‘tall and black’ Muḥammad b. Maslama of the Banā (tribe of) Aws in Medina and Abā ‘irmā b. Abī Anas of the Banā #Adiyā b. al-Nijjār, joined the prophet Muḥammad’s movement once he stood up. Others, however, like Umayya b. Abī l-‘alt of al-‘āʾif and Abā Qays b. al-Aslat of Medina, two prominent Ėunafāʾ, became implacable enemies of the new prophet due to loyalties to the Quraysh. Muḥammad even had a number of Ėunafāʾ in his own family. In fact, the four leading Ėunafāʾ in Mecca in his day – Zayd b. #Amr b. Nufayl, Ubayd-Allāh b. Jaʾsh, #Uthmān b. #Uwayrith, and Waraqah b. Nawfal – “were (all) related to Muhammad, being descended from a common ancestor Liwaʾ.” The first, Zayd b. #Amr b. Nufayl, is particularly important because it was him, from the Black Quraysh tribe, who introduced Muḥammad to ‘Islam’ when Muḥammad was still an idolator.

621 W. St. Clair Tisdall, The Original Sources of the Qurʾān (London, 1911) 260.
Zayd, a distant relative of the Prophet and cousin to Islam’s second caliph, #Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, was by far the most important ÈanÊf for the development of Muḥammad’s Islam. He was apparently an outspoken public critic of the Quraysh’s idolatry and ‘pagan’ practices, in much the same way Muḥammad would be some years later. He adhored idolatry, condemned the practice of burying baby girls alive, and refused to eat meat sacrificed to gods other than Allāh. Some of his poetry is preserved in which his religious views are expressed:

Am I to worship one lord or a thousand?

If there are as many as you claim,
I renounce al-Lāṣt and al-ʿUzza both of them
As any strong-minded person would.

I will not worship al-ʿUzza and her two daughters,
Nor will I visit the two images of the Banu ʿAmr…

I serve my Lord the compassionate (al-Raḥmān) That the forgiving Lord may pardon my sin, So keep to the fear of Allāh your Lord.

Most significantly, Zayd apparently described his ÈanÊfiyya as islām, saying: “I have surrendered my face [aslamtu wajhī] to Him to Whom the earth…surrenders”. The verbal idiom, aslama wajh, found later in the Qurʾān (3:20), is likely the root of the verbal noun islām. In other words, Zayd was a self-confessed muslim reformer before Muḥammad. We are even told that he prostrated in his worship of Allāh, putting the palms of his hands to the ground as he bent his body down in worship. This of course anticipates the Muslim sujåd.

As an outspoken critic of the idolatry of the Quraysh, Zayd earn the latter’s ire, as did Muḥammad later. Among his severest harassers was al-Khaṭṭāb, his uncle and the father of #Umar, the second caliph. The harassment was so severe in fact, Zayd had to leave Mecca, retreating to the outskirts. He could reenter the city only secretly. After this exile, he spent considerable time in a cave in the mountain opposite the city, Mount Ṣirāt. When he died, five years before Muḥammad stood up, he was buried at the foot of the mount. Now this is the very mount to which Muḥammad would begin retreating to engage in certain religious practices before his Call. It was in one such cave, according to a number of reports, that the still ‘pagan’ Muḥammad encountered Zayd who introduced him to ÈanÊfiyya/islām. According to a tradition reported in Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855), al-Khargāshī (d. 1015), Ibn Kathīr, and others, Zayd b. #Amr passed Muḥammad and Zayd b. Ṣrītha, the Prophet’s adopted son, while they were eating meat sacrificed to one of the idols in this cave.

Muḥammad offered some to Zayd (b. #Amr), who refused and admonished Muḥammad for this, declaring: “I don’t eat meat offered to any god but Allāh taṣāḥh”. Muḥammad was deeply affected by this. After the exchange he and Zayd b. Ṣrītha are said to have went to the Kaaba and circumambulated it, he forever forbidding Zayd b. Ṣrītha from stroking the idols again. Muḥammad later claimed: “By Allāh, I did not draw near the idols at all (after this) until God granted me prophethood.” Uri Rubin perceives the significance of this encounter:


On which see Charles J. Lyall, “The Words ‘anīf’ and ‘Muslim,’ JRAS 35 (1903):

629 Ibn Isḥāq, 99-100.

630 Ibn al-Kabīr reports in his Kāshī al-ḥaṣn (Ed. Aḥmad Zakī Pasha [Cairo, 1914] 19.) that the Prophet “offered a white ewe to ʿUzza following the religious practices of his people.” 19.


632 Musnad, III, 116-17, no. 1648.

the tradition…implies that [Zayd] was a monotheistic adherent of dīn Ibšhēm (the monotheistic religion of Abraham), while Muḥammad was still an idolater…From this tradition, which Muslim scholars indeed tried to reshape, one must… conclude that Zayd was indeed a ÈanÊf who introduced to Muḥammad the monotheistic dīn Ibšhēm. This inspiration from the ÈanÊf Zayd might account for the fact that Muḥammad first called his reform movement ÈanÊfiyya, only later adoting ‘Islam’ as the name of his brand of ÈanÊfiyya. But this too, as we saw, is consistent with Zayd who seems to have used both descriptions. It was thus through these early ‘Allāh-alone’ advocates, the prominent ones in Mecca being members of his own [Black] family, that Muḥammad is introduced to islām. It has elsewhere been demonstrated that the popular, orthodox tale of the Prophet’s encounter in the cave with the angel Jibrīl, an encounter said to have initiated him into his prophethood, is a secondary pious fiction created by weaving multiple, independent (and at times contradictory)
This is not at all to suggest that there was no divine or angelic involvement in Muḥammad’s 20 year prophetic reform movement; it is to say that his introduction to Islām was through his own (Black) kinsmen. His own [Black] father, we recall, was named #Abd Allāh, ‘servant of Allāh’. 640

634  Shayarāf al-Muṣāaffī.

635  Al-Bīḍaṣya wa ‘l-nihṣya (Beirut and Riyadh, 1966) II:240.


638  Waardenburg, “Towards a Periodization,” 311: “Significantly, the movement took the name of the ‘ān-Efīya…before becoming known as Islām.”


640  On the significance of which see Tisdall, Original Sources, 34.

Chapter Six Beyond Bilṣl: The Black Muslims in Arabia

I. Islam’s Black Tribes

Historian St. Clair Drake, in an otherwise remarkably astute discussion of Blacks and race in Islam, certainly understates the case when he states that “There were a few blacks among the original circle of believers (around Muḥammad).” 641 The most famous of these ‘few’ Black followers of Muḥammad is unquestionably Bilṣl b. Rabṣī (d. 642), the Ethiopian-turned-Arabian slave, who would go on to become the first Muslim caller of the faithful to prayer (Muezzin). Bilṣl is the face of the Black contribution to Islam, such that ben-Jochannan, in his book The African Origins of the Major “Western” Religions, focuses almost exclusively on him when treating the ‘African Influence on Islam.’ 642 So too did Dr. John Henrik Clarke, when discussing ‘The Rise of Islam in Africa,’ focus on Bilṣl and one other, Zayd b. Ṣrīthā (d. 630), whom Clarke misidentifies as a fellow Ethiopian. 643 An alternative ethnology of Islam, more consistent with currently available ethnographic data, is reflected in a report attributed to the prophet Muḥammad himself. We are told that Muḥammad had a dream in which he saw black and white sheep following him and the white sheep were so numerous that the black ones were hardly noticeable. When he consulted Abā Bakr, a known dream interpreter, it was explained:

641  Drake, Black Folks, 2:86.


the black ones are the Arabs and the white ones are the non-Arabs who were converted to Islam after them (the black Arabs); they will be converted in such large numbers that the black ones will not be noticed any more. 644

From this report we learn that the original Muslim followers of Muḥammad were the black Arabs who were later engulfed by the white non-Arab converts (Persians, Byzantines, Turks, etc.) to Islam. The historical data bears this out. That is to say, the Black contribution to Islam was not restricted to “a few” Blacks, most of whom were former slaves. Rather, instead of speaking of a ‘Black contribution’ at all, we must speak of the ‘Black origins’ of Islam, and the Black Arabs who are the main actors in the drama that was nascent Islam – both the protagonists and antagonists – were the Black Arabian descendents of the original Africans. We will discuss here some of the most important black Arab tribes for the history of post-Qurʾānic Islam.

I.1. Banā Quraysh

No question, the most important tribe in the history of early Islam is the Quraysh, the tribe of the Prophet Muḥammad himself and the caliphs, as well as the dominant tribe in Mecca during the pre-Qurʾānic period. The Quraysh tribe was the paramount black tribe, considered the most noble of the Arab tribes. As Robert F. Spencer remarks: “It is said that the Quraysh explained their short stature and dark skin by the fact that they always carefully adhered to endogamy.” 645 Al-Iṣṣāli (d. 869), the important Afro-Iraqi scholar of ninth century Baghdad, noted in his Fakhr al-ṣādīn  al-bidan, “The Boast of the Blacks over the Whites”:


The ten lordly sons of #Abd al-Muṣāazzalib were deep black (dalham) in color and big/tall (∙ukhm). When Amir b. al-ulfay saw them circumambulating (the Kaḥba) like dark camels, he said, “With such men as these is the custody of the Kaḥba preserved.” #Abd Allah b. #Abbas was very black and tall. Those of Abā •ṣlib’s family, who are the most noble of men, are more or less black (ṣād).” 646

This report is important for our discussion, not only because #Abd al-Muṣāazzalib and his ten black sons were pure Arabs, but also because they are the family of the Prophet, #Abd al-Muṣāazzalib being his paternal grandfather. 647 The Syrian scholar and historian al-Dhahabī (d. 1348) too reported that #Abd Allāh b. #Abbās, Muḥammad’s first cousin, and his son, #Alī b. #Abd Allāh, were “very darkskinned.” 648 #Alī b. Abā •ṣlib, first cousin of the Prophet and future fourth caliph, is described by al-
643 This convergence of blackness, nobility and Qurayshī ethnicity is further demonstrated in these lines attributed to the seventh century CE Qurayshī poet, al-Fâl b. al-Abbâs, called al-Akhâr al-Lahab "The Flaming Black": al-Fâl is the Prophet Muḥammad’s first cousin and he said: “I am the black-skinned one (al-Akhâr). I am well-known. My complexion is black. I am from the noble house of the Arabs.”651 Ibn Manîār (d. 1311) notes the opinion that al-Akhâr here means aswad al-jilida, ‘Black-skinned’, and signifies that al-Fâl is from khsîli b. al-#arab, the pure Arabs, “because the color of most of the Arabs is dark (al-udma).”652 Similarly Ibn BarrÊ (d. 1193) said also: “He (al-Fâl) means by this that his genealogy is pure and that he is a pure Arab (#arab b. Mâ-) because Arabs describe their color as black (al-aswad).”653 Thus, al-Fâl’s blackness (akhrâr) is the visual mark of his pure, Qurayshí background, being born of a pure Arab mother and father.

The Quraysh consisted of several sub-clans. #Abd al-Muâ‘alâlib and his descendents, including Muḥammad, belonged to the Banâ Hîshîm. Henry Lammens takes notice of “les Hîshîm, famille où dominait le sang nègre” (“the Hashimites, the family where Black blood dominated”).654 Lammens remarks that they are “généralement qualifiés de "cé = couleur foncée” (“generally described as §dam = dark colored”). But the Banâ Hîshîm were not the only sub-clans noted for their blackness. The Banâ Zuhra, the tribe from which the prophet’s mother, Amîa bt. Wahb, hailed, was likewise noted for its blackness. See for example the famous Sa#d ibn Abî Waqqâs (d.ca. 646), cousin of Amîa and uncle of Muḥammad. He is described as very dark, tall and flat-nosed.

651 Ibn Manîâr, Lišîn al•arab, s.v. رضخا IV:245f.
652 Ibn Manîâr, Lišîn al•arab, s.v. رضخا IV:245; E.W. Lane, Arabic-English, I: 756 s.v. ضخما.
653 Ibn Manîâr, Lišîn al•arab, s.v. رضخا IV:245.

193F Muḥammad, it should be noted, was quite proud of his uncle Sa#d whose military contributions we shall discuss below. We are told that once Muḥammad was sitting with some of his companions and Sa#d walked by. The prophet stopped and taunted: “That’s my uncle. Let any man show me his uncle.”656

Another important Qurayshī sub-clan is the Banâ 'l-Mughîra of the larger Qurayshī sub-clan the Banâ Makhzâm. Al-Jâ‘îî noted: “The clan of Mughîra is the Khu′r of the tribe of Makhzâm.”657 By “the Khur” al-Jâ‘îî means the exceptionally black-skinned.658 Thus, the second caliph ‘Umar’s mother, 'antâma bt. Hîshîm b. al-Mughîra, from Banâ 'l-Mughîra, is described as black.659 This was an exceptionally powerful Qurayshī clan. Hîshîm b. al-Mughîra was head (sayyid) of the Quraysh in Mecca, such that “Hîshîm” and “Mecca” were interchangeable terms. When he died the people of Mecca were summoned to the funeral of their ‘lord (rabb)’.660 They were also a significant part of the Meccan opposition to Muḥammad. In fact, the infamous ‘Amr b. Hishâm, better known as Abâ Jahl (“Father of Ignorance”), the implacable enemy of Muḥammad who brought about the fateful boycott against the Prophet in 616–18, was the leader of the exceptionally black Banâ 'l-Mughîra.661 He commanded the Meccan forces in the battle of Badr, a prominent portion of which were from the Banâ 'l-Mughîra. However, when Muḥammad conquered Mecca in 630, this black tribe accepted Islam and was incorporated into the new order.

654 Études sur le siècle des Omayyades (Beirut: Imprimerie Calholique, 1930) 44.
655 al-Dhahabi, Siyar, V:253
656 #Abd al-Ra‘ûmân Râfat al-Bâshâ, 'uwar min Èay al•aÈžbah (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risâlah, 1974-75)287.
657 Al-Jâ‘îî, Fâkhîr al-sâdîq b. al-bi#dân.
658 See also Berry, Unknown Arabs, 78.659 Al-Mas‘âdÊ, Prairies, IV, 192; El2 6:139 s.v. Makhzâm, Banâ by M.
Quraysh, the blackness of a crow, were Sulaymī’s. Tariq Berry points out, a number of the so-called ‘Arab Crows,’ Arabian poets that were so black-skinned that they recalled both al-JāÈií and Ibn Athīr (11

The Banå Azd were a black tribe, a trait retained in its many sub-clans. The Ghassan were called black-skinned (akh∙ar) as was the Shana’a (adam). The Dawššir, a bedouin tribe of the central deserts of Yemen and Najd and a branch of Azd, were described by Burckhardt when he encountered them in the eighteenth century as “very tall men, and almost black.”

Well-known representatives of the Khazraj and al-Aws were noted for their blackness. Ub§da b. al‘ṣmit (d. 34/654), called “a negro” by Phillip Hitti, was an eminent Anß§rÊ in Yathrib before the Prophet’s arrival there. He was “black-skinned, and tall” So too Nabtal b. al‘arir of the Aws, of whom al-Badalhari said: “He was tall and jet-black, with nappy hair, a huge body and red eyes.”

The point cannot be stressed enough: the two historically most significant groups in terms of the genesis and early evolution of MuÈammad’s movement, the Muhajirun and the Anfšr, were drawn primarily from black tribes, the descendents of the ancient Afribans. As such, most of the important figures in early, postQurʾīn Islam were from among these Black Muslims. Zayd b. Thšbit (d. 665-6), from the black Banå Khazraj, is illustrative of this point. He was MuÈammad’s personal secretary who collected from him the verses of the Qurʾīn. It was he, Zayd (not to be confused with Zayd b. a‰rith; see below), who prepared the first mushaf or text of the Qurʾīn and delivered it to the first caliph Abå Bakr.

The Banå Sulaym were a powerful tribe who commanded the road to Medina and access to Nejd and the Persian Gulf. Both al-JāÈií and Ibn Athīr (11th cent. CE) noted the Banå Sulaym’s deep blackness and that they were ‘pure Arabs’. As Tariq Berry points out, a number of the so-called ‘Arab Crows,’ Arabian poets that were so black-skinned that they recalled the blackness of a crow, were Sulaymī’s. They played an important role in the struggle between MuÈammad and the Quraysh, participating in the treacherous Bi’r Ma#åna ambush in 625 that killed 69 of 70 Muslims. They were also a part of...
The Ban å Sulaym were noted not only for their blackness, but for their beauty as well. Nafr b. Hajjîj b. #Il§s al-SulaymÊ’s beauty caused such a commotion in Medina that the Caliph #Umar b. al-Khaâṣbî had to exile him to Basra where the governor was a fellow SulaymÊ, Muğshî# b. Mas#âd. Nafr’s cousin, Abâ Dhi“b, was also expelled on the grounds of his beauty.678 This ‘black beauty’ no doubt played a role in the Banå Sulaym’s popularity. When #Umar asked that prominent persons from the provinces be sent to him, all of those sent were reportedly SulaymÊs.679 The prophet MuÈammad himself married a SulaymÊ, Sanê§ bt. Asmê§ bt. al-‘alt al- yaršîmiya, because of her beauty and intelligence.680 On the other hand, he was also scandalized by their beauty. It is a SulaymÊ, ‘afw§n b. al-Mu#âaâl (d.638), whose beauty can be said to be at the center of the infamous ifk (lie) affair. While traveling #$“isha - reputedly the favorite wife of the prophet got left behind accidently by her caravan back to Medina. One of MuÈammad’s companions, ‘afw§n, who was the caravan’s rear guard, pulled up after several hours and brought #$“isha back to Medina on his camel. Immediately upon entering the city rumors spread that #$“isha is a young, handsome man (many reports stress his good looks!) had an affair on the way. #$“isha’s honor was vindicated, according to Islamic tradition, by the revelation of surat Al-Når [24].681


676 Berry, Unknown Arabs, 77.


678 Lecker, Banå Sulaym, 79.

I.4. Banå Muȧrib and Banå Sakån

The Ban å Muȧrib were a typical Bedouin tribe from the mountainous region of southern Nejd, between Medina and alYamîm. According to the renowned Islamic linguist of the 14th century CE Ibn Manîår the Muȧrib were akh∙ar, black.682 They were hostile to MuÈammad early in his campaign and he sent a number of expeditions against them. In 630, however, the Banå Muȧrib gave formal allegiance to the prophet of Islam.683

679 Lecker, Banå Sulaym, 80.

680 Lecker, Banå Sulaym, 85.

681 On him see EI2 8:19-820 s.v. ‘afw§n b. al-Mu#âaâl by G.H.A. Juynboll.

682 Ibn Manîår, Lis§n al- #Arab, 1:848.

683 EI2 vol. 7 s.v. Muȧrib by G. Levi Della Vida. On the black Muȧrib see also Berry, Unknown Arabs, 77.

The Ban å Sakån played a much more critical role in the early history of Islam. They were a branch of the Kinda tribe, which was an Arab tribe from Southern Arabia (Hadramawt).684 According to a report in al•abarÊ (d.923) the Banå Sakån were an Arab tribe distinguished by their “black complexion and straight hair”.685 These black Sakånîs were involved in the more infamous episodes of early Islam. From the Sakån came the subclan Banå Tujīb who were among the earliest settlers in Egypt and principally concerned in “the turning point in the history of Islam,” the revolt against the third caliph #Uthmân b. Affîn.686 They were part of the Egyptian rebels that marched on Medina.687 It was in fact a SakånÊ, either Såd§n b. umr§n or Kinша b. Bishr, who wielded the weapon and killed the caliph. And it was another SakånÊ, Khşlid b. Muljam who assassinated the fourth caliph #AIÊ b. AbÊ alib.688 A memorable event in the Second Civil War also involved the Sakån. The stone catapults that rained in 683 on the ‘aram controlled by the anti-caliph #Abd All§h b. al- Zubahîr, catching the Ka‘ba on fire, were those of ‘ussayn b. Numayr alSakån who conducted the siege of Mecca for the Umayyad Caliph YazÎd b. Mu#âwiya (d. 683).689 ‘ussayn was governor of the important district of ‘imÎ under YazÎd.690 II. Zayd b. #rîtha: MuÈammad’s Black Son and Successor

684 EI1 4:1019 s.v. Kinda by F. Krenkow.


In 578 CE in the D åmat al-Jabal area of Arabia Zayd b. #rîtha was born to an Arab father, #rîtha b. Sharı#b from the Southern Arabian tribe Banå Kalb, and an Arab mother, Su#d§, from the Banå Ma’n.691 While a young boy, his village was attacked by a rival Arab tribe while his father was away. The young Zayd was among those taken as captives and eventually sold as a slave at the Ukşi market. His purchaser, #akÈm b. uz#m, was a nephew of Khşdîja, MuÈammad’s wife. She
presented Zayd to Muʿāmmad as a gift. We are told that Muʿāmmad took an immediate liking to Zayd and freed him. Zayd will eventually grow so dear to Muʿāmmad that the latter adopted him as his son, such that the young man became known as Zayb ibn Muʿāmmad (Zayd the son of Muʿāmmad) as well as ibb Rasāl AlĪṣh, “the Beloved of the Messenger of God.”

Zayd was very dark-skinned, short and rather flat-nosed. On this basis many wrongly assume he was an enslaved Ethiopian. When he is described as “a negro slave” the implication is that he, like the Abyssinian Bilīṣl, was an African enslaved in Arabia. Dr. John Henrik Clarke even goes so far as to declare that Zayd and Bilīṣl were together two Ethiopian slaves. This is surely incorrect. Zayd was actually a Black Arab from tribes descendent from the original Aftāfrs. His slave status resulted from inter-Arab conflict.

Some years after being with Muʿāmmad Zayd was spotted in Mecca by a relative who promptly gave the good news to his father Ṣrīthā who was torn up by his son’s disappearance and had searched far and wide for him. Receiving the good news, we are told, Ṣrīthā and his brother rushed to Mecca and identified themselves to the now-prophet, requesting that he allow their son and nephew to return with them. Heart-broken, but knowing it to be the just thing to do, Muʿāmmad is said to have put the matter to Zayd himself, all parties agreeing to honor the young man’s wishes. Zayd replied that Muʿāmmad was the best father and uncle he had known, and thus opted to stay. Upon hearing this, according to a report on the authority of the prophet’s wife ʿĪṣā, Muʿāmmad took the hand of Zayd and went to the Kaḥba, declaring to the Quraysh that were gathered there: “Bear witness, all ye that are present, Zayd is my son: I will be his heir, and he shall be mine.” This implies that black Zayd is selected as the prophet’s successor, except that he died before Muʿāmmad. What is implied here is explicitly stated in another report attributed to ʿĪṣā who says: “The Prophet never sent Zayd on an expedition except as commander, and if his life wasn’t so short, he would have made him his successor.” Confirmation of Muʿāmmad’s intent to make Zayd his successor is no doubt found in the fact that whenever the prophet was away on an expedition, he left Zayd as governor and commander in Medina. In other words, Muʿāmmad always put Zayd in command in his absence, both on military expeditions and as governor of the nascent Muslim state in Medina.

In his work, Islam’s Black Legacy: Some Leading Figures (1993), Mohammed Abu-Bakr includes among 62 leading Black figures of Islam the prophet Muʿāmmad himself. Abu-Bakr rightly notes:

According to Muslim tradition, Muḥammad descended in a straight line from Ishmael’s second son Kedar (Arabic: Qaidar), whose name in Hebrew signifies ‘black’…From the sons of Kedar inhabiting the northern Arabian desert, sprang the noblest tribe in Arabia, the Koreish (Quraysh), the tribe from which Muḥammad descended.

As we have also discussed above, the Arabian Qedar were a black tribe akin to the equally black Nabataeans, and these two were in someway related to the Quraysh, the black tribe par excellence of Mecca. One would thus expect the Qurayshī prophet to be black too, especially since he reportedly claimed to be a pure Arab for the house of Hāshim; this would make him very black-skinned like the pure Arabs from that tribe. Muʿāmmad’s pedigree actually demands this as his whole immediate family tree were pure, black-skinned Qurayshī Arabs. I quote again AlĪṣī’s important note in his Fakhır al-sāḍṣī al-bidān:

After two failed marriages, Zayd married the prophet’s Ethiopian foster mother, Baraka, and they bear a son, Usṣīma b. Zayd, who inherited from his parents black skin and a flat nose. He also inherited from them Muʿāmmad’s affection, being called ibb lbn ibb Rasāl AlĪṣh, “The Beloved, son of the Beloved of the Messenger of God.” In accordance with the prophet’s practice, the first caliph Abā Bakr would leave Usṣīma in charge in Medina while out on expeditions. III. Muʿāmmad: Black or White?

In his work, Islam’s Black Legacy: Some Leading Figures (1993), Mohammed Abu-Bakr includes among 62 leading Black figures of Islam the prophet Muʿāmmad himself. Abu-Bakr rightly notes:

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The ten lordly sons of #Abd al Muḥāalib were deep black (dalham) in color and big/tall (ūkhm). When Amīr b. al-ufayl saw them circumambulating (the Kaḥba) like dark camels, he said, “With such men as these is the custody of the Kaḥba
Berry explains in his book, The Unknown Arabs, this is simply not the case: such as white, green, blue, and red meant the same to the early Arabs that they do to us today. But as Moroccan scholar Tariq but in our modern, Western inability to appreciate the pre-modern Arabic color classification system. We assume that terms describe another (Muhammad) as both of dark brown complexion and as white? The problem, it turns out, is not in these texts incomprehensible. Yet, the same Ansar b. Malik who informed us of the dark brown complexion of the prophet, also informs us Mu‘ammad's lineage is a mix of Quraysh, Sulaym, and Khazraj blackness. All of these father-son pairs shared this deep blackness, what about the Mu‘ammad - Mu‘ammad pair? We would expect the same, unless Mu‘ammad's mother made a mitigating contribution. But this is not likely. Amina, the prophet’s mother, was an Arab from the Quraysh sub-clan Banu Zuhra, which was a black clan. Amina’s cousin and Mu‘ammad’s maternal uncle, Sa‘id ibn Waqqas, also from Banu Zuhra, was very dark, tall and flat-nosed. He is supposed to have described himself as “Arab of the Arabs, of the purest blood of your land, of the family of the Hashim and of the tribe of Quraysh.” Quoted in Chandler, “Ebony and Bronze,” 285.

But Mu‘ammad had more than just Quraysh blackness running through his veins. His great, great grandfather was #Abd Man‘af who bore with Stika bt. Murra al-Sulaym, the prophet’s great grandfather \\


Mu‘ammad’s lineage is also mix of Quraysh black Arab blood. His mother, Amina, is the daughter of Wahb b. #Abd Man‘af bt. Zuhra whose mother (Amina’s grandmother) is said to be a Sulaym, another Stika bt. Al-Awqa' b. Al-Awqa’ b. Al-Awqa’. The black Sulaym are thus considered the maternal uncles of the prophet and he is therefore reported to have said: “I am the son of the many #Stikas of Sulaym.” This all indicates that Mu‘ammad’s lineage is a mix of Quraysh, Sulaym, and Khazraj blackness.

We thus have every reason to expect Mu‘ammad to be blackskinned, and no reason to believe anything else was possible. We in fact find him described as such in Tirmidhi’s Sham‘ il al-Mu‘ammad, in Risalat Ihya‘ al-Umran, 4 vols. (1964/1384) I:209.

The Messenger of Allah… was of medium stature, neither tall nor short, of a goodly build. His hair was neither curly nor preserved.” #Abd Allah b. #Abbas was very black and tall. Those of Aba ‘Sil’s family, who are the most noble of men, are more or less black (sâd).
The term white can be very confusing to those reading about the description of people of the past because, in the past, when Arabs described someone as white, they meant something entirely different from what is meant today. In the past, when the Arabs described someone as white, they meant that he had a pure, noble, essence or that he had a nice, smooth complexion without any blemishes. They meant he had a black complexion with a light-brownish undertone.

Berry’s point is confirmed by the appropriate Classical Arabic/Islamic sources. Ibn Maniår affirmed that “When the Arabs say that a person is white, they mean that he has a pure, clean, faultless integrity…They don’t mean that he has white skin…” Similarly, al-Dhahabī informs us that “When the Arabs say a person is white, they mean he is black with a light-brownish undertone.” Particularly important was the observation of the 9th century CE Arabic scholar Thalab, who tells us that: “The Arabs don’t say that a man is white because of a white complexion. White to the Arabs means that a person is pure, without any faults. If they meant his complexion was white, they said ‘red’ (aÈmar).” Indeed, as David Goldenberg notes, ‘white’ in pre-modern Arabic was about “luminosity, not chromaticity.” That is to say, ‘white’ connoted brilliance, not paleness of skin. The latter was described as ‘red’ (aÈmar), which is how non-Arab whites such as Persians and Byzantines were described. In other words, what we call white today the early Arabs called red, and what they called white often was what we would today call black!

It is certain that Mu Èammad could not have been what we consider white today; he could not have been fair or pale-skinned at all, for a pale-skinned Arab was such an oddity that the prophet could not have claimed to be a pure QurayshÊ Arab. The seventh century Arab from the tribe of Nakhāʾī, Shurayk alQā∙ī, could claim that, because it was such a rare occurrence “a fair-skinned Arab is something inconceivable and unthinkable.” So too did al-Dhahabī report that: “Red, in the language of the people from the Hij§z, means fair-complexioned and this color is rare amongst the Arabs.” On the other hand, the Arabs prided themselves on being black, is conscious contrast to the pale-skinned non-Arabs. Al-JaÈií could still claim in the 9th century:

العربية تفخر بالسوداء اللون

“The Arabs pride themselves in (their) black color”

These noble Black Arabs even detested pale skin. Al-Mubarrad (d. 898), the leading figure in the Basran grammatical tradition, is quoted as saying: “The Arabs used to take pride in their darkness and blackness and they had a distaste for a light complexion and they used to say that a light complexion was the complexion of the non-Arabs”. Part of the reason for this distaste is that the slaves at the time were largely from pale-skinned peoples, such that aÈmar “red” came to mean “slave” back then, just as #habid “servant/slave” means black today in the now white Muslim world. As Dana Marniche observes:

Anyone familiar with the Arabic writings of the Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian historians up until the 14th century knows that this is also their description of the early ‘pure’ Arab clans of the Arabian peninsula… [i.e. “blackener than the blackest ink – no shred of white on them except their teeth.”]…The irony of history is that early Arabic-speaking historians and linguists made a distinction between the Arabs in Arabia and the fair-skinned peoples to the north; and contrary to what may be fact in our day, in the days of early Islam, those called ‘Arabs’ looked down condescendingly on fair-skinned populations and commonly used the phrase ‘fair-skinned as a slave’ when describing individuals in tribes in the peninsula that were pale in complexion…Of course, today due mainly to slavery and conversion of peoples to the ‘Arab’ nationality, the opposite is thought to be true by many in the West.

A red or pale-skinned Mu Èammad would thus have been a profound oddity in 7th century Arabia and would have had little chance of success amongst the proud, black Meccans and Medinese. The Meccan objectors to his message accused him of
some of everything, but never of being a non-Arab! There is absolutely no reason to believe he was pale-skinned other than much later representations that coincide with a major demographic change it the Muslim world, a change that brought with it a strong anti-black ideology.723 We thus have every reason to accept the truth of Anṣ b. Mšlik’s description of the prophet as dark brown (asmar) and to conclude that, as his black cousins #Alī and al-Fa∙l resembled their black fathers (his black uncles), he resembled his black father, especially since his mother’s side was black as well.724

723 See below.
724 Chandler, “Ebony and Bronze,” 280: “All of the chronicles that survive intact agree that Ismael and Muhammad were of the Black Race…A careful examination of history reveals that the Prophet Muhammad…was of the Black Race and was black in complexion.”

Chapter Seven
Islam and Black Power: The Eras of the Rṣhidån and the Umayyads

I. The Muslim Conquests and Black Power

In 638 the Persian ruler Yazdgird III pleaded to the T’ang emperor of China, T’ai-tsung, for assistance against the Arabs who had invaded his realm. This assistance was refused. In 651 an embassy led by Sa#d b. Abī Waqqās, that tall, dark and flatnosed uncle of MuÈammad who led the Persian campaign, arrived in China bearing gifts. There are two extant notices of this embassy in Chinese literature: in the ninth-century administrative text, T’ung tien, which was presented to the throne in 801 by Tu Yu. It covers the history of the world up to the reign of Hsian-tsung (712-56); and in the T’ang History, the official dynastic history of the T’ang completed in 945. In these texts are notices regarding the Arabs (called there Ta-shih) encountered during the Yung-hui period (650-656). The notices read: “The Arab country was originally part of Persia. The men have high noses, are black and bearded.”725 These Black Arabs here described are those Muslim conquerors of Persia and the East. The conquerors of the West are similarly described, as demonstrated by the Song of Roland (wr. ca. 1100). Sir Roland was champion of Charlemagne’s Frankish army who fought the Saracens, the invading Muslim armies in the eighth century. Roland is quoted describing his Muslim foes as “hordes blacker than the blackest ink – no shred of white on them except their teeth.”726 He further describes the Saracen commander:


at their head rides the Saracen…no worse criminal rides in their company, stained with the marks of his crimes and great treasons, lacking faith in God, Saint Mary’s son. And he is black, black as melted pitch…

Fourteenth century miniatures depicting Roland’s battle with the Saracens, the Battle of Roncevaux, clearly depict the Black Muslims. In one from Charles V’s Grandes cronique de France, Roland and his white-skinned forces charge the black-skinned Muslims led by their equally black King Marsile (Figure 39).727 We thus have testimony of the conquered peoples from the far east to the extreme west that the Muslim conquerors were Black. Ivan van Sertima’s note that “Africans were pivotal…in the spread of Islam” is therefore an understatement.728 So too is Drake’s remark that “The jihad armies that erupted out of Arabia had black warriors in their ranks.”729 The ranks were predominantly Black.730 The Muslim conquests were a true Black Operation, indeed a Black Power operation, one might say.

727 Image from Strickland, Saracens, demons, & Jews, 180, Fig. 87.
728 Ivan van Sertima, Golden Age of the Moor, 19.
729 Drake, Black Folks, 103.
730 Even Daniel Pipes observation that “numerous blacks fought for the early Muslims” is understated, in that he only considers the presence of Ethiopians (Habashi) and subSaharan Africans (Zanj) in the Muslim armies. He does not consider the Black Arabs or Afrabians. See Daniel Pipes, “Black Soldiers in Early Muslim Armies,” International Journal of African Historical Studies 13 (1980): 87-94.
These Black Arabs or Afrabians (African-Arabians) were not unruly hordes; rather, as Hugh Kennedy remarks, “the campaigns were directed by a small group of able and determined men,” men who weren’t Bedouins but members of an urban elite. They were not unruly hordes; rather, as Hugh Kennedy remarks, “the campaigns were directed by a small group of able and determined men,” men who weren’t Bedouins but members of an urban elite. Their targets were clear and precise: between 630-730 CE, the Black Muslim armies swept through the southern portion of the Byzantine and the western portion of the Sassanian (Persian) empires. These two had been the pillars of White Power for several centuries before the Muslim conquests. The Persians, like the Byzantines, were Aryans, not Semites. The Persian was considered “the whitest and most hook-nosed”

By the time of the conquests the Byzantine and Sassanian empires had been the dominant powers in Western Asia, North Africa and Europe for over 400 years. It was the Black Muslims of Arabia, led by “a Pleiad of brilliant generals of Meccan origin,” who toppled these ‘white powers’.

These brilliant generals were as Black as their troops. The conquest of Syria and, initially, Iraq was led by “the greatest general of the Muslim army,” the famous Khālid b. al-Walīd (d. 642), known also as Sayfū l-Lāhi l-Maslūl, the “Drawn Sword of God”. Khālid was not only from the paramount Black tribe Quraysh, but from the exceptionally black sub-clan the Banā lMughāra. Black and tall (over 6 ft we are told), Khālid engineered the decimation of the Byzantine troops in Syria and the Persian troops along the Iraqi frontier. In fact, he received the epithet “Sword of Allah” after putting Byzantines to the sword at Mu‘ta.

In his first sweep of the border of lower Iraq and Yamama, Khālid and his forces are said to have killed upwards of 70,000 Persians at Amghāshayš. At al#Udhayb and Najaf Khālid reportedly massacred the Persian garrisons and took their wives and children captive, and he killed the Persian defenders at #Ayn al-Tam. Of these brilliant generals from Mecca was also Abā l-A#war b. Sufyṣn from the exceptionally Black Banā Sulaym. Abā l-A#war was a prominent Sulaymī during the Umayyad period, having fought with Mu‘awiyya at ‘iffÉn. At the Battle of Yarmak commanded by Khālid he was in command of a cavalry squadron, which included fellow Sulaymīs. However, after Khālid’s death, Abā l-A#war commanded the Syrian army in the expedition of Ammuriya in 644 and raided Cyprus in 647.
Syrian conquest was a true Black Ops. It is thus fitting that it was black Bil§l who negotiated with the Byzantines the surrender of Damascus, causing Prince Constantine to exclaim: “I will have nothing to do with this black slave.”

After taking the Iraqi frontier cities al\Éra, Anb§r, Dåmat alJanbal, and Ayn Tamr, Kh§lid was redirected by the caliph Abå Bakr back to Syria. Command of the Iraqi troops was given by the second caliph #Umar to Abå Ubayd from the Banå ThaqÊf of •§"if. Abå Ubayd led the Muslim troops at the disastrous Battle of the Bridge, the worst defeat suffered by the Muslims in the early conquests. In the reorganization of the Muslim army #Umar put in command the tall and black Sa#d b. Abî Waqqâs. It was through Sa#d that redemption came to the Muslim troops and mission in Iraq. It was he who won the iconic Battle of Q§disiyya in 636, which opened up all of Iraq to the Muslims. Sa#d led a small, improvised and ill-equipped army over the might of imperial Persia. The Persians were led by a new commander-in-chief, the legendary Rostam Farrokhz§d who is today the touchstone of Iranian nationalists. Persians/Iranians thus loath the black Sa#d, who reportedly killed Rostam at Q§disiyya and brought down the Sassanid empire. He is held responsible for the destruction of Persian civilization in the capital Ctesiphon, where he abolished the famous Sassanid library and great palaces. It was a routing for the Persians, whose fugitives were pursued by flank commanders Zuhra b. alHawiyya and Qa#q§ b. Amr who “killed them in every village, reed thicket, and river bank.”

The Muslim conquests of Syria and Iraq therefore were Black Muslim conquests. The troops were predominantly Black Arabsians, like the Mahra and Sulaym, and the commanders were the famous Khålid b. al-Wålid, Abå l-A#war b. Sufy§n and Sa#d b. Abî Waqqâs, three Black generals. By bringing an end to the Byzantine and Sassanian empires, the Black Muslims from Arabia brought down the centuries-old ‘white power’ edifice in those areas. The same is true with the conquests of Egypt and North Africa.

I.1. The Conquest of Egypt

The conquest of Egypt by the Muslims in 641 was a Black Op from top to bottom. It was the second caliph, #Umar b. alKhaåã§b (d. 644), who was the chief architect of the Islamic state. It was his troops who “broke the power of the Persian Sassanid empire and proceeded to annex Iran and Iraq to Arabia.” He further brought Syria, Phoenicia, Persia, Jerusalem, and Egypt into the D§r al-Isl§m. With the destruction of Carthage in the third Punic War (150-146 BCE) Rome became the supreme power in North Africa. It was #Umar and the Muslim troops that broke up this White power block in Africa.

# Umar was a Black QurayshÊ Arab. His mother \antama bt. H§shim b. al-MughÊra, was from the exceptionally black Banå al-MughÊra. Al-Mas’ådÊ (Prairies, IV, 192) says she was Black. His paternal grandmother was an enslaved Ethiopian. He was certainly no “fair, pale man, with a touch of redness.” His famous son, #Abd All§h, was himself “very dark-skinned and huge” and said regarding their blackness: “We inherited our black complexion from our maternal uncles.”

Arabs, such as the Mahra and the Akk. When #Amr b. al#Aß requested reinforcements from #Umar, the caliph sent 4 detachments of 1000 apiece. One detachment was headed by alMiqd§d b. al-Aswad (“son of the Black [man]”), who was black; one by the “black-skinned and tall” MuÈEammad b. Maslama; one by the black #Ub§da b. al§mit; and one by alZubayr b. al-Awwan, one of the very few pale-skinned Muslims involved in the expedition.
The Islamic Empire under #Umar

Leading the troops into Egypt was the Arab general #Amr b. al-Aß who previously commanded the Muslim forces in southern Palestine. He too had an Ethiopian mother. The troops he commanded in the Egypt expedition were mainly black Yemeni.

A famous incident nicely illustrates the nature of the Muslim conquest of Egypt. When Cyrus, the Byzantine governor of Egypt, sought negotiations with #Amr b. al-Aß in October 640, the latter deputed ten of his officers to negotiate. Apparently not all ten were Black Arabs, but they were led by #Ubṣda b. al-'ṣmit. When the tall and black Ubṣda was ushered into Cyrus’ presence, the governor was shocked and exclaimed: “Take away that black man: I can have no discussion with him!” The party insisted that Ubṣda was the wisest, best, and noblest among them and their appointed leader, declaring that “though he is black he is the foremost among us in position, in precedence, in intelligence and in wisdom, for blackness is not despised among us.” #Ubṣda himself then replied to Cyrus: “There are a thousand blacks, as black as myself, among our companions. I and they would be ready each to meet and fight a hundred enemies together. We live only to fight for Allah, and to follow his will. We care nought for wealth, so long as we have wherewithal to stay our hunger and to clothe bodies. This world is nought to us, the next world is all.” Benard Lewis makes an important observation here: “#Ubṣda is not African nor even of African descent but (as the chroniclers are careful to point out) a pure and noble Arab on both sides.” The thousand fellow blacks, probably the detachment of which he was commander, are no doubt Black Arabs like him.

Arnold J. Toynbee, in his groundbreaking A Study of History, notes that: the Primitive Arabs who were the ruling element in the Umayyad Caliphate called themselves ‘the swarthy people,’ with a connotation of superiority, and their Persian and Turkish subjects ‘the ruddy people,’ with a connotation of racial inferiority.
Abī Sufyān (d. 680). Mu#āwîya’s ethnicity is indicated by the description al-Dhahabi gives of the caliph’s son, Y§zid b. Mu#āwîya: “He was black-skinned, hairy and huge.” Ibn #Abd Rabbih reports in his al#Iqd al-farîd that Mu#āwîya said to two of his advisors:

I see that these white folks ( humr, pl. of ahmar) have become very numerous and are saying bad things about those who have passed. I can envision a daring enterprise from them against the authority of the Arabs. I am thinking of killing half of them and leaving half of them to set up markets and to build roads.

Mu #āwîya the Umayyad caliph wanted to make slaves out of those ‘white folks’. It was during Islam’s first dynasty, which lasted from 661-749, that Islam was truly ‘a Black thing’. Ira M. Lapidus very poignantly points out regarding the Umayyad Arabs:

Mu Èammad’s implicit dream and the dream of his closest or religiously most sensitive followers might have been to convert the world to Islam, but for the Arab leaders (Umayyads) the world had been conquered in the name of Islam, not for the sake of converting it to Islam. For them, being Arab and being Muslim distinguished the conquerors from the masses of vanquished Middle Eastern peoples. Islam was to be the unifying emblem of the victorious Arab elite, the mark of the ruling class.

This explains why conversion of the conquered peoples to Islam was such a slow, centuries-long process: there was no interest on the part of the Muslims to convert them. G.R. Hawting says again:

Although it can be debated whether the Koran was addressed to all men or to the Arabs only, the Umayyads and the Arab tribesmen who first conquered the Middle East regarded their religion as largely exclusive of the conquered peoples. There was no sustained attempt to force or even persuade the conquered peoples to accept Islam.

Umayyad ‘blackness’ was not restricted to the Quraysh, of which the Umayyad’s constituted a sub-clan. The Banå Sulaym were very important during this period. Not only were they generally supporters of the dynasty, but “Sulaym’s contribution to Mu#§wiya’s success was fundamental.” This is seen in his selection of provincial governors. Because the amÊr or governor represented the caliph himself in very important ways in the province, picking these officials was a serious task of the highest priority for the caliphs.

A great many of the Umayyad governors were Sulaymûns, such as Abå l-A#war b. Sufy§n who was Mu#§wiya’s governor in Urdunn and #Abd All§h b. Kh§zim (d. 73/692) who governed Khurasan and also Marw.


G.R. Hawting, G.R. Hawting,

Lecker, Ban å Sulaym, 245 n. 112.


Hawting, First Dynasty, 35.

II.1. The Abbasid Revolution and the Aryanization of Islam

Wayne Chandler, in his essay “Ebony and Bronze: Race and Ethnicity in Early Arabia and the Islamic World,” advances (though he does not originate) a peculiar ethnohistory of Islam’s political dynasties. Following the ideas of early 20th century political activist and writer George Wells Parker, Chandler argues that the Umayyads were Islam’s white Semitic dynasty, while the Abbasids were “a Black nationalist movement”. This ethnic division is based on an assumption operative throughout Chandler’s essay: that there is a difference between ‘Blacks’ on the one hand and ‘Semites’ on the other, and that the latter were whites or the peoples described as ‘Reds’ in Arabic literature. These particular claims, based as they are on the lack of a purview of the relevant Arabic source materials, unfortunately diminish the value of an otherwise quite valuable discussion of race and Islam. The historic and ethnographic evidence indicates quite clearly that the opposite situation played out on the ground: that is to say, the Umayyads were the ‘Black nationalist movement’, while the Abbasid revolution formally initiated the process of the Aryanizing of Islam.

As Jan Restö points out:

the Abbasid revolution in 750 was, to a large extent, the final revolt of the non-‘arab Muslims against the ‘arab and their taking power. This revolt was dominated by the Iranian ‘aÆam (non-Semitic foreigners), and the outcome was the establishment of at least formal equality between the two groups.

Thus, according to al-J §Èií (Bay§n III, 366) the Abbasid empire was #ajamiyya (of non-Arab foreigners) and Khurasanian (Persian), while the Umayyads were #arabiyya (Arab). The Abbasid Revolution was thus much more than a political revolution, but a cultural one as well. As Richard W. Bulliet aptly pointed out:

Nothing influenced the emerging shape of Muslim society and culture so much as the massive influx of new Muslims who had no prior experience of life in Arabia or the culture of the Arabs.

Ronald Segal notes the consequences of this influx:

increasing intermarriage served to submerge the original distinctions, and increasing numbers of the conquered, having adopted the religion and language of the conquerors, took to assuming the identity of Arabs themselves (emphasis mine-WM).

In other words, Persians and others who were inexperienced in and ignorant of (Black) Arabic culture converted to Islam, adopted the Arabic language and began identifying themselves as Arabs. Yet they introduced into Islam and Arab culture what was non-existent before, in particular anti-Black sentiments. This is demonstrated most convincingly in a famous poem by the ninth century poet Abâ al’asan AlÈ b. al-Abb§s b Jurayj, also known as Ibn al-RâmÈ (d. 896), in which he blames the Aryanized Abbasids for…racism against the Prophet’s family:

You insulted them (the family of the Prophet Mu Èammad) because of their blackness, while there are still pure-blooded black-skinned Arabs. However, you are blue (eyed) - the Romans (Byzantines) have embellished your faces with their color.

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The end of the Umayyad Dynasty in 750 CE signaled the effective end to Black Islam. The Aryanized Abbasid Dynasty will be followed by the rise of the Seljuks (Turks) and eventually the Ottoman Empire (Turks again). The white sheep have become so numerous and have dominated Islam for so long now, most people cannot conceive that Islam started among the black sheep.

III. Black Islam: The Threat to White Supremacy

According to Diop, “Except for the Islamic breakthrough, Europe has ruled Africa down to the present day.” This is an important observation, especially when we keep in mind that the breakthrough was a Black Islamic breakthrough. The establishment of the (Black) Islamic empire followed on the heels of the demolishing of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires in West Asia and Africa. In other words ‘Black Power’ replaced ‘White Power’ on the world stage and the agents of this transition were Black Muslims from Arabia. After overthrowing the Byzantines in North Africa the Muslims (Black Arab and African) headed to Europe and, after defeating the Visigoth army and killing the last Visigoth king, Roderick, in 711 added the Iberian Peninsula to the Islamic empire. For 800 years Black Muslims, called Moors, ruled southwest Europe. As a consequence, in the psyche of White Christian Europe the Black Muslim incarnated evil itself. As James Brunson and Runoko Rashidi note: ‘because of his dark complexion and Islamic faith, the Moor became in Europe a symbol of guile, evil, and

Diop, African Origin, p. 119.

On these Black Moors see especially Sertima, Golden Age.

The material coming out of Europe during this period leaves no room to doubt that the Black Muslim was perceived as the greatest threat to White Christendom. This fact is probably illustrated by the 11th century coat of arms commemorating Peter III of Aragon’s victory over the Moors in 1096. During the battle four Moorish princes fell. On the coat of arms their black heads surround a Christian cross (Figure 41). This was updated on a gold coin after 1700 by King Charles of Hapsburg. These Black Muslim heads on this European Christian coat of arms undoubtedly symbolized victory over the perceived chief threat.

It is more than likely that we should read all of this history into the admission by Lothrop Stoddard, American historian and political scientist, that Black Islam is a singular threat to ‘white world supremacy.’ In his, The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy, Stoddard confesses:


Concerning Islam’s steady progress in black Africa there can be no shadow of a doubt. Every candid European observer tells the same story. ‘Mohammedanism,’ says Sir Charles Elliot, ‘can still give the natives a motive for animosity against Europeans…’ Twenty years ago another English observer, T.R. Threlfall, wrote: ‘…The rapid spread of militant Mohammedanism among the…tribes to the north of the equator is a serious factor in the fight for racial supremacy in Africa…’ Islam is as yet unknown south of the Zambezi, but white men universally dread the possibility of its appearance…


Chapter Eight
Islam and Africa

I. Islam’s Peaceful Penetration

It is the case that the empire of (Black) Islam entered Africa with the sword. Black imperialism from all eras, including ancient Kemetic imperialism, relies on military advancement. It is not the case, however, that the religion spread at the same time and by the same means. As we saw above, the Umayyads saw Islam as exclusive to themselves and refused to proselytize at all. The religion did not begin spreading in Africa until centuries later, and when it did it was carried by merchants and religious specialists, not soldiers. Too many scholars, black and white, have debunked the myth of Arabs violently imposing Islam on Africans for it to still have circulation, though in some circles it still does. Cheikh Anta Diop, in his Pre-Colonial Black Africa, affirms:


See for example Michael Brett, who notes: “The stereotype of a religion preached initially by the sword has long given way to recognition of the fact that the Arab conquerors were more concerned with tribute, and to the conclusion that proselytism was against the interests of the new rulers, since conversion would diminish the number of tax-paying subjects.” “The Spread of Islam in Egypt and North Africa,” in Michael Brett (ed.) Northern Africa: Islam and Modernization (London: Frank Cass, 1973) 2.

Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels, “Patterns of Islamization and Varieties of Religious Experience Among Muslims of Africa,” in Nehemia Levtzion and...
Much has been made of Arab invasions of Africa: they occurred in the North, but in Black Africa they are figments of the imagination. While the Arabs did conquer North Africa by force of Arms, they quite peaceably entered Black Africa…From the time of the Umayyad setbacks in the eighth century, no Arab army ever crossed the Sahara in an attempt to conquer Africa, except for the Moroccan War of the sixteenth century…Nor was there ever any Arab conquest of Mozambique or any other East African territory. The Arabs in these areas, who became great religious leaders, arrived as everywhere else individually and settled in peacefully…The Arab conquests dear to sociologists are necessary to their theories but did not exist in reality.

Only during the Almoravide movement of the first half of the eleventh century did some white people, Berbers, attempt to impose Islam on Black Africa by force of arms…The primary reason for the success of Islam in Black Africa, with one exception, consequently stems from the fact that it was propagated peacefully at first by solitary Arabo-Berber travelers to certain Black kings and notables, who then spread it about them to those under their jurisdiction.”

Joseph E. Harris in his Africans and Their History says as well: “it is noteworthy that except for the northern coast, Islam spread rather peacefully until the eighteenth century, with one significant interruption—the Almoravid conquests.” J. Spencer Tringham, in A History of Islam in West Africa, agrees:

“However, now we know that the Almoravids were a Black African movement: see James E. Brunson and Runoko Rashidi, “The Moors in Antiquity,” in Sertima, Golden Age, 61.


The role of the Murabitun (Almoravids) in the Islamization of the Sudan has been exaggerated. The peaceful penetration of Islam along trade routes into borderland towns had begun before this movement was born…The Murabitun simply accelerated a process that had already begun, and their conquest was ephemeral because the attraction of Morocco was stronger than that of the Sudan (emphasis mine-WM).”

I. Hrbek and M. El Fasi:

“During the great Arab conquests, there was certainly no attempt to convert the ahl al-kitab (Jews and Christians) by force…generations of scholars have…clearly demonstrated that the image of the Muslim Arab warrior with sword in one hand and the Quran in the other, belongs to the realm of mythology.”

And finally Z. Dramani-Issifou: “Prior to the twelfth century, Islam advanced on African soil without wars, without violent proselytism.”

II. Relations of Black Muslims in Egypt and Black Christians in Egypt and Nubia


Z. Damani-Issifou, “Islam as a social system in Africa since the seventh century,” in Hrbek, General History, 54.

The main weaknesses of Chancellor Williams classic discussion of the Muslim invasion of Egypt in 641 and attempted invasions of Nubia in 643 and again in 651-52 is his inaccurate ethnographic assignments. Williams saw the Muslim/Nubian conflict as one between White Arabs and Black Nubians: the Arab conquerors were “Caucasians,” he informs us. As we have demonstrated above, the Muslims who conquered Egypt were mainly Black Arabs from Southern Arabia led by Black Arabs from Mecca in North Central Arabia. We thus have to do with a Black-on-Black conflict, not a White on Black one. The fact is particularly important to keep in mind when considering the Egyptian Coptic response to the Muslim invaders who targeted and overthrew the oppressive Byzantine regime there. The great W.E.B. Dubois correctly noted: “the Arabs invaded African Egypt, taking it from Eastern Roman Emperors and securing as allies the native Negroid Egyptians”. As Mamadou Chinyelu put it as well: “These African Copts no doubt saw the African Muslims from Arabia as liberators; after all they were kith and kin.”

The Byzantine emperor Heraclius supported the minority Chalcedean church led by the Patriarch from the Caucasus, Cyrus, against the majority Coptic (Monophysite) church. Coptic sources tell of ruthless and systematic persecution. As St. Clair Drake observes: “The Coptic Christians of Egypt welcomed the Arab Muslims as ‘liberators’ from what they considered the tyranny of their fellow Christians in Constantinople.” According to Hugh Kennedy’s research, the conquerors distinguished between the Egyptian Copts and what they called the ‘Râm’ (Romans): the latter were considered the enemy and the former actually assisted the Muslim ‘liberators’ who were as Black as they. Copts at Farṣma for instance aided the Muslims, and at the little town of Bahnas§ the Black Muslims slaughtered all the ‘Râmê’ men, women and children they came across.

There was no attempt to convert the Copts to Islam. As Ira Lapidus explains:

The necessary arrangements between the conqueror(s) and conquered were implemented in the reign of the second Caliph, 'Umar (634-644)...(A) principle of 'Umar's settlement was that the conquered populations should be disturbed as little as possible. This meant that the Arab Muslims did not, contrary to reputation, attempt to convert people to Islam...At the time of the conquests, Islam was meant to be a religion of the Arabs, a mark of caste unity and superiority. When conversions did occur, they were an embarrassment because they created status problems...Just as the Arabs had no interest in changing the religious situation, they had no desire to disturb the social and administrative order...local situations were left in local hands... (In the conquered lands) the whole of the former social and religious order was left intact.

In terms of the local Christian community, Lapidus points out that “Arab policy attached no liability to the church or to membership in it. Nor...did the Arabs encourage conversion to Islam.” The Black Muslims had a ‘pro-Black’ policy: in direct contrast to the Byzantines who empowered the minority, Roman church, the Muslims empowered the Coptic church. In fact, the Muslims gave all of the Chalcedonian churches over to the Copts and refused to appoint any Chalcedonian Patriarchs.

Thus the [Copts] gained in Egypt and gained in Nubia as well... The Umayyad caliphs Mu#āwiya and #Abd al-M§lik (d. 705) built several churches in Alexandria and Fusâṣağ, as did the Egyptian governor #Abd al#AzÊz b. Marw§n (d. 705). The Church of St. George and the monastery of Abå Qarqar at 'aw§n are but two examples.

This policy lasted for most the Umayyad period, when Islam was ‘a Black thing’. However, toward the end of this period, attitudes and then policy changed. The reign of # # 720 signaled this changed attitude. He was less protective of the Coptic church and more encouraging of conversion, though Egyptian policy did not change in that regard except that he decreed any converts exempt from the poll-tax that non-Muslims paid. By the Abbasid period, however, things are radically different. Chalcedian Patriarchs were being appointed again and their churches returned to them from the Copts. In other words, the transition from ‘Pro-Black Isam’ under the Black Umayyads to Aryanized Islam under the Abbasids signaled a change in the religious situation, they had no desire to disturb the social and administrative order...local situations were left in local hands... (In the conquered lands) the whole of the former social and religious order was left intact.

In terms of Nubia, #Amr b. al#Aß, the conqueror-turned-governor of Egypt, had a non-aggression policy. As Williams admits: “despite the continued raids by the Blacks [of the South] he (#Amr) chose not to extend his operations into their land.” This policy, however, will be revoked in 643 by then governor #Abd Alîṣḥ b. AbÊ ‘arÊ, who launched an invasion of the northern Nubian kingdom of Makuria. This invasion was a failure, to say the least: the Nubians dealt the Muslims a devastating defeat, and again in 651-652. Williams, aptly describing this conflict as ‘one of the decisive battles of history’, perceptively remarks: “The psychological effects of being defeated by the Blacks twice on national fronts caused the Arabs to adopt a peaceful relationship with these countries that lasted 600 years.” This six-hundred year peace was the result of the baqã agreement, signed by both parties at the conclusion of the 651-652 battle. The baqã was both a non-aggression pact and a trade agreement between Muslim Egypt and Nubia, terms which were determined by the victors: Nubia.

1. The citizens of each country were allowed free passage to the other, with security guaranteed by the host country.
2. A mosque was to be built in Nubia and a church in Egypt.
3. 360 slaves annually sent by Nubia to Egypt, in exchange for 1300 ardeb of wheat and 1300 kanÊr of wine, linen and cloth.

The last stipulation has been the focus of some criticism and misrepresentation in some Christian and Africenist circles, with support even from Muslim misrepresentation. This part of the agreement is often described as tribute imposed on the helpless Nubians by the lustful Muslim slavers, a covert plan to eventually conquer the Sudan. But this interpretation completely fails to take proper notice of a simple fact: the Nubians were the victors and therefore had the leverage. As Jay Spauling explains:

The Nubians won decisively. ‘The Muslims...had never suffered a loss like the one they had in Nubia.’ For the next six
centuries thereafter the Nubian authorities were able to impose their own terms upon relations with the Islamic world, an arrangement commonly known…as the baqã. The baqã exemplified the institution of administered diplomatic trade through which eastern Sudanic kings normally preferred to conduct their foreign relations…With the passage of centuries, various Islamic intellectuals, eager to forget the initial Nubian victory, devised increasingly elaborate and fanciful accounts that undertook to construe baqã shipments as payment of tribute (emphasis mineWM).

The baqã was thus a Nubian arrangement made with the defeated Muslims, not the other way around, and it had precedent in common Sudanic diplomacy: trading with Nubian slaves goes back to ancient Kemet. The arrangement guaranteed Nubia’s independence and facilitated Nubian national/cultural progress for six centuries.

The resulting trade opportunities contributed to a Nubian florescence. As S. Jakobielski notes in his study of Christian Nubia:

The truce was upheld throughout the next five centuries of Christian civilization in Nubia and in its initial phase was crucial for maintaining peace and the possibilities for national development. The lack of any real threat on the part of the Arabs and the possibilities of carrying on trade with Egypt and maintaining contacts with Byzantium led to the development of a distinctive Nubian culture…Thus the end of eighth century saw Nubia moving into its period of prosperity, which lasted up to and including over a half of the twelfth century and was also conditioned by a favorable economic situation.

Hostilities between Muslim Egypt and Christian Nubia began in the 13th century. Egypt was ruled by the Turkish oligarchy, the Mamluks. In 1269 the Mamluk sultan Baybars rejected a Makurian baqã initiative, a rejection for which the Nubian king retaliated by sacking the Egyptian Red Sea port of Aydhab in 1272. Four years later Mamluk forces invade and conquer Makuria and by 1324 the land became a rich slaving ground for Muslim merchants. It is to be emphasized here that while Islam was ‘still black’, if you will, relations with the Copts and Nubians were peaceful and mutually beneficial. As John Henrik Clark admits: “The peaceful Arab and African partnership in the citystates of Africa went on for more than a century before the Arabs turned their normal trading apparatus into a human slave trading enterprise.” That century was the period of the Black Umayyad Dynasty. In post-Umayyad Islam which went through a process of Persianization and Turkification (sic) or, in short, Aryanization, racism became rampant such that Islam went from Pro-Black to Anti-Black. This process impacted the literature, the theology, and the policies of the Islamic world. The most horrendous legacy of this process is the East African Slave Trade.

Chancellor Williams and Yusef Ben Jochnannan, among other Africentrist scholars, have insisted in the past that Islam is, viz-aviz African Peoples, a slave religion. The claim is generally that African peoples are Muslims today primarily because Arab Muslims were deeply involved in the African slave-trade. While the latter point is certainly true and of great significance, it is not the case that Islam was first encountered by African peoples through the Arab slave-trade. First, as was demonstrated, African peoples originated Islam in Arabia and brought it back to Africa in the 7th century. Secondly, there was minimal forced conversion to Islam of Africans on the mainland before the 19th century. Before then the religion – apart from the empire – spread throughout Africa rather peacefully, as we demonstrated above.

The institution of slavery is found throughout the ancient world and existed in traditional African society from antiquity to the modern world. It thus comes as no surprise that it is found in North East Africa, i.e. Arabia, at the time of Mu‘ammad. The Qur’an assumes its existence and does not ban it outright. Apparently like Ma’at of ancient Egypt, Islam was not deemed incompatible with the institution. Instead, like the Egyptian Negative Confessions which stipulated proper ‘Maatic’ behavior with regard to (among other things) slaves, the Qur’an does ‘enunciate precepts and injunctions aimed at mitigating the condition and encouraging manumission.” The early Muslims therefore did participate in the institution, though in its more ‘humane’ form (at least in the beginning). But there is something very important regarding this early Muslim practice of
As Dana Marniche explains:

I. Introductory Summary

The religious texts of the ancient East and India, i.e. the hieroglyphic writings of ancient Kemet (Egypt), the cuneiform
the legendary figure, the mythological creator-god, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, was black, as is shown, for example, in the cosmological narrative of Vindobonensis Obverse and York: Random House, 1976] 71-89; Negel Davies, The Aztecs: A History [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980] 258-9). But regardless of the ethnic identity of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, the Totec ruler was likely either a native or maybe an African immigrant (B.C. 1:26. It is necessary to distinguish the historical-legendary figure, Topiltzin Questzalcoatl from the mythological-cosmological figure, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl. The ethnic identity of the former has been a matter of speculation. While a number of scholars cling to the post-Conquest myth of the legendary figure as a “bearded, white” foreigner (e.g. Graham Hancock, Fingerprints of the Gods [New York: Three Book Publishers, 1995] 82-26. The blackness of these deities did not necessarily indicate that they were chthonic (associated with death and the underworld) or in any way malevolent. Indeed, in the various ancient traditions, it was the king of the gods, the creator deity himself, who was black. The blackness of the creator deity, that is to say the creator deity’s black body-how it originated, of what substance(s) it was composed, why it was black, etc.-was at the center of many atoms, which the God used to build up his own luminous body. This body was anthropomorphic and thus this God was the first man in existence, a self-created man. This was a brilliantly luminous man, represented by the so-called ‘sun-gods’ of ancient myth. Indeed, the sun in the sky was said to be only a sign of the luminous anthropomorphic body of the creator-god.

This God’s initial attempts at creation proved unsuccessful, as the brilliant luminosity of the divine form scorched material creation. As a solution the God veiled his luminosity with a body made from that same primordial dark substance from which he initially emerged. This divine black body refracted the divine light as it passed through the hair pores covering the body. This black body is therefore referred to in later literature as God’s ‘shadow’ as it shades creation from the scorching heat of the ‘sun’ or luminous body of God. As the light passed through the hair pores of this divine black body it produced a dark-blue iridescence or glow. The ancients symbolized this visual effect by the semiprecious stone lapis lazuli, which was a dark blue stone with golden speckles throughout. The God’s body at this stage was thus depicted dark blue and said to be made of sapphire/lapis lazuli. Veiled in this (blue-)black body, the God successfully produced the material cosmos. The creator-gods of ancient myth were thus often painted dark blue.

Animals were used by the ancients to represent or symbolize various characteristics or attributes of the gods. The so-called ‘attribute animal’ of this black-bodied creator-god was the black bovine,* usually a bull. The bull symbolized the strength and fecundity of the creator-god. It also associated the God with the primordial dark waters, which the bull was believed to personify. As the God’s black body was made from this primordial darkness, the black hide of the bull represented the black skin of the creator-god. This black body of God symbolized by the black bull was at the center of the ‘mystery of God’ in the ancient Mystery Systems. In ancient Kemet (Egypt), for example, the greatest mystery concerned the union of the sun-god Rē#, i.e. the luminous body of God, with the black god Osiris, the personification of the divine black body.

II. The Black God in Antiquity

Godfrey Higgins, in his still prodigiously, Anacalyptsis, observed:

We have found the Black complexion or something relating to it whenever we have approached the origin of nations. The Alma Mater, the Goddess Multimammia, the founders of the Oracles, the Memnon of first idols, were always Black. Venus, Jupiter, Apollo, Bacchus, Hercules, Astarte, Adonis, Horus, Aapis, Osiris, and Amen: in short all the...deities were black. They remained as they were first...in very ancient times.

Though made over a century ago, current History-ofReligions scholarship only confirms Higgins’ observation. The major deities of Egypt, India, Asia, the Near East, Greece and Central and South America were indeed black. Of special note we may mention, in addition to those listed above, Min of Egypt, VißÖu and KrißÖa India, Buddha of Asia,*‘Il/'El/Al of the Near East, and Quetzalcoatl of the early Americas. The blackness of these deities did not necessarily indicate that they were chthonic (associated with death and the underworld) or in any way malevolent. Indeed, in the various ancient traditions, it was the king of the gods, the creator deity himself, who was black. The blackness of the creator deity, that is to say the creator deity’s black body-how it originated, of what substance(s) it was composed, why it was black, etc.-was at the center of the ‘mystery of God’ in ancient Egypt, India, and Sumer/Akkad.


824 On VißÖu and KÜßÖa see below.


826 Werner Daum, Ursemitische Religion (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1985) and below.


See below.

Figure 43

Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl, Black creator-God of Central America lifting the Primordial* Sky

III. The Black God and his Black Bull

In antiquity various aspects of the gods were represented zoomorphically. That is to say, different animals were used to symbolize distinct characteristics or attributes of a deity, who was otherwise anthropomorphic. The paramount ‘attribute animal’ of the black creator-god was the black bovine*, usually a bull (Figure 19). The bull represented potency, fecundity, and primordial materiality, all essential characteristics of the creatorgod. The color of the bull was not arbitrary. As René L. Vos


830 On the symbolism of the bull see Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, translated by Rosemary Sheed (1958; Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) 82-93; Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst (edd.), Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, 2nd Edition (Leiden pointed out, “Color reflected the nature of a god” and thus the skin color “constituted the vehicle of the divine nature of a sacred animal.”

831 Over against the golden lion or falcon, which symbolized morning/midday sunlight, the black bovine symbolized night and materiality. The black bovine was associated with the black primordial waters from which the creator-god emerged; it thus came to symbolize the black material body that the creator-god will form for himself, the black skin of the bovine signaling the black skin of the deity. Thus, the hide of the sacrificial bull of ancient Sumer/Akkad, which was required to be ‘black as asphalt (Figure 30),’ was ritually identified with the skin of the Sumerian/Akkadian creator-deity Anu.


833 “Varius Coloribus Apsis,” 711.

834 Parpola, “New correspondences,” 181 suggests that “the dark buffalo bathing in muddy water was conceived as the personification of the cosmic waters of chaos”. In
This association between divine and bovine skin is explicitly articulated, for example, in the Indic scripture Śatapatha-Brāhma. With regard to the black tārpya garment worn by the king during the Indic royal consecration ceremony called Rṣ jasāya. During this ceremony the king ritually impersonated the creator-god and divine king Prajñāpātī-Varuṇa. The black tārpya garment worn by the king represented the body of the royal creator-god (Prajñāpātī-Varuṇa) whom the king impersonated here. Regarding the tārpya garment and by implication its divine counterpart, Śatapatha-Brāhma 3, 1, 2, 13-17 notes: Wilson, “The Fifth Tablet of Enuma Elish,” JNES 20 (1961): 175 [art.=154-179]. On the black bull and the waters of creation see also Vos, “Varius Coloribus Apis,” 715, 718.


See e.g. the black skin of the Egyptian deity Min (Figure 14), the ‘creator god par excellence,’ and his black bovines (H. Gauthier, Les fêtes du dieu Min 2 vols. [Le Caire, 1931; IFAO. Recherches d’Archéologie] 255-57; P. van Bosch, “Yama-The God on the Black Buffalo,” in Commemorative Figures [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982] 21-64). In contrast, but making the same point, see the white-skinned Śiva and his white bull Nandi. In one description of the Babylonian kal-ritual the slaying and skinning of the black bull is mythologized as the god Bel’s slaying and flaying of the god Anu, whose characteristic attribute animal was the black bull. See Daum, Urseremische Religion, 204; E. Ebeling, Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier 2 vols. (Berlin-Leipzig, 1931) 129; C. Bezold, Babylonisch-assyrisches Glossar (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1926) 210 s.v. sugugala; Georgia de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, Hamlet’s Mill: An essay on myth and the frame of time (Boston: Gambit, Inc., 1969) 124. On Anu see further Herman Wohlestein, The Sky-God AnAnu (Jericho, New York: Paul A. Stroock, 1976).

I will use ‘Indic’ throughout this work to refer to the traditions of ancient India, as opposed to ‘Indian,’ which is popularly, though erroneously, associated with the indigenous groups of the early Americas.

Brāhmānas are Vedic texts dealing with priestly sacrifices and rituals. it (i.e. the tārpya garment) is indeed his (i.e. king’s) own skin he thereby puts on himself. Now that skin which belongs to the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man. The gods spake, ‘Verily, the cow supports everything here (on earth); come, let us put on the cow was originally on man.


In explaining the relation between the black ritual garment and the black cow skin, it is here recalled that the latter actually was once man’s own skin, who lost it to the cow (man was ‘flayed’). This black bovine skin apparently once covered man’s fleshy skin as an exterior layer, according to this mythical account. In place of this lost exterior layer, man was given the black tārpya garment. Now whenever the cow sees a naked man it flees in fear of him trying to retrieve his original ‘garment,’ the black skin that now protects the cow from inclement weather. It must be kept in mind that the Vedas are the literary work of the invading Indō-Aryan tribes, and this description of the flaying of man’s black skin reflects the actual experience of the indigenous ‘black, snub-nosed’ Dasyu tribes who were indeed flayed by the Aryan hordes. This historical flaying is mythologized in the Ṛg Veda (1.130-8) where the Aryan deity Indra is described as tearing off the black skin of the Asura, the gods of the pre-Aryan black tribes. In this Ṛjasāya or consecration ritual the human king is impersonating the divine king, God, whose skin is represented by the bovin skin. The black garment/bovine skin represents the black skin of the pre-Aryan...
black gods. Asko Parpola has demonstrated that both the tārpya garment and its divine analogue, the ‘sky garment’ of the gods (i.e. the divine body), are associated with the skin of the mythic ‘bull of heaven.’


III.1. The Blue-Black Creator-God

In his Praeparatio Evangelica (III, 115a, 7) the fourth century church historian Eusebius of Caesarea quoted from Porphry’s (ca. 233-309) lost work, Concerning Images, a note on an Egyptian view of the Creator: “The Demiurge (creator-god), whom the Egyptians call Cneph, is of human form, but with a skin of dark blue, holding a girdle and a scepter, and crowned with a royal wing on his head.” While we have by now come to expect the divine human form, the dark blue skin requires some explanation. Indeed, the leading gods of the ancient Near East were not just black, but blue-black. This dark ‘blueness’ of the divine body had profound significance. It was not just any blue, but sapphire blue. In biblical tradition and in ancient and medieval texts generally the term ‘sapphire’ denoted the semiprecious stone lapis lazuli. Considered the ‘ultimate


845 The dark blue skin of the anthropomorphic deities of Egypt was ādyu or ēsbd (lapis lazuli), which is a blue-black: See Caroline Ransom Williams, The Decoration of the Tomb of Per-Nēḥ (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1932) 52f; J.R. Harris, Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals (Berlin: AkademieVerlag, 1961) 226.

Divine substance,” sapphire/lapis lazuli possessed great mythological significance in the ancient Near East. In its natural state lapis lazuli is dark blue with fine golden speckles recalling the “sky bedecked with stars” thus the visible heaven is often said to be sapphiric.

This sapphiric heaven, called the ‘sky- garment’ of the gods, was associated with the divine body, ‘garment’ being an ancient and widespread metaphor for body. Thus, the leading deities of the ancient Near East had sapphiric-blue bodies. This is particularly the case with deities associated with fecundity or creation.

In Egypt, “The traditional colour of (the) gods’ limbs (was) the dark blue lapis lazuli.” The dark blue skin of the anthropomorphic deities of Egypt was ādyu or ēsbd (lapis lazuli), which is a blue-black: See Caroline Ransom Williams, The Decoration of the Tomb of Per-Nēḥ (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1932) 52f; J.R. Harris, Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals (Berlin: AkademieVerlag, 1961) 226.

845 The dark blue skin of the anthropomorphic deities of Egypt was ādyu or ēsbd (lapis lazuli), which is a blue-black: See Caroline Ransom Williams, The Decoration of the Tomb of Per-Nēḥ (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1932) 52f; J.R. Harris, Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals (Berlin: AkademieVerlag, 1961) 226.

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855 The ancient Near Eastern cult statue, which was considered the earthly body of the deity, was ideally made of a wooden core platted with red gold or silver, overlaid with sapphires, all of which signified substances from the body of the deity: “his (i.e. Rē#’s) bones are silver, his flesh is gold, his hair genuine lapis-lazuli.”

856 But the hair too was a


860 Exod. 24:10; Ez. 1:26 (LXX); William Brownlee notes “This dome (of heaven) was thought of as sapphire in color, and as crystalline and transparent.” Ezekiel 1:19 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 13. Nut, the ancient Egyptian sky goddess, “glistens like lapis lazuli.” See Assmann, Liturgische Lieder, 314ff. text III 4. The association of the heavens with precious stones is found in Babylonian cosmologies as well, which may have influenced biblical cosmology. According to W.G. Lambert, the Babylonians associated their three heavens (upper/middle/lower) with stones, the lower deriving its blue from the jasper stone (“The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon,” in Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe (edw.), Ancient Cosmologies [London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1975] 163-184.)

861 See especially Parpola, Sky-Garment; idem, “Harappan ‘Priest-King’s’ Robe”; Oppenheim, “Golden Garments.” This designation arises from the golden star-like ornaments or appliqué work sewn into the garment recalling the star-spangled night sky. 853-854. The word of the Great Creator is “beautiful youth of purest lapis lazuli (È nšb¬d bštis-È šm-nfr n È sšd-mÈh) whose ‘body is heaven’” (ht. K mtw). See J. Assmann, Sonnenhymnen in thebanischen Gräbern (Mainz: a.R., 1983) 5, #65; 124, # 43-14; A.I. Sadek, Popular Religion in Egypt During the New Kingdom (Hälsingland, 1987) 14. See also Grey Hubert Skipwith, “‘The Lord of Heaven.’ (The Fire of God; the Mountain Summit; The Divine Chariot; and the Vision of Ezekiel),” JQR 19 (1906-7): 693-4 and illustrations in Othmar Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World. Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms (London: SPCK, 1978) 33-4. In Manichaean tradition, the Mother of Life spread out the heaven with the skin of the Sons of Darkness according to the
Before creating the cosmos, according to ancient Near Eastern tradition, the black god created himself, or, rather, his body:
Teresi, The God Particle: If the Universe is the Answer, what is the


According to this mythic tradition there was in the beginning only darkness, material darkness universally described as ‘water.’ 866 Hidden within this dark primordial water was the deity in a formless, luminous* state. 867 This primordial ‘water’ was characterized by what the Indic texts call jīmi, the undifferentiated state of non-differentiation of its constituent elements. All potential dualities (e.g. light/darkness, spirit/matter, male/female), which are a prerequisite to the generative process, lay undistinguished and negatively homogeneous; the ancient Egyptians called it the “state in which did not yet exist two things.” Creation begins with the distinguishing and separation of these elements. 869 How long this primeval,* homogeneous mass with its hidden divine luminosity existed is not indicated. At some point, however, God’s luminosity concentrated itself within the primordial waters into a single point, producing the first distinguishable particle of luminous matter, 870 the mythical ‘golden germ’ or fiery a-tom, 871 the quark of modern-day quantum physics. 872 This soon

864 Speaking more broadly K.K.A. Venkatachari (“Babylonian, Assyrian and Other Accounts” in Dange, Myths of Creation, 34) notes: “The myths regarding the creation of the universe and life, as found in the literature of the ancient civilizations bear remarkable similarity which is not easy to explain away, considering the lack of communication in the olden days and the fact that there was not print or other media as we have now.”


866 For example the spiritual and featureless Brahman (neuter), which existed within the Indic primordial waters, was “brilliant, without body, sinewless”: see E. Osborn Martin, The Gods of India: A Brief Description of their History, Character & Worship (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd. And New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1914) Chapter 1; T.S. Maxwell, The Gods of Asia: Image, Text, and Meaning (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30; Kurian Mathothu, “The Development of the Concept of Triumurti in Hinduism” (M.A. Thesis, University of Madras, 1985) 31-42. S.S. Dange, “Egvedic Accounts,” in Dange, Myths of Creation, 10 notes: “In all the mythological accounts of Creation in the (Eg Veda), Water and heat (i.e. a ‘ray of light’) seem to be the basic principles.”


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870 The Hīrāya-Garbha, according to Daniélou, Myths and Gods of India, 234, is a “ball of fire from which the universe develops” and Von Franz, in her discussion of cosmogonic ‘Germes and Eggs’ appropriately describes the mythical germ as an “enormous concentration of energy in...one center,” Creation Myths, 232. These descriptions identify the ‘golden germ’ with the quark (a-tom) of modern physics, the fundamental particle of matter, which is also a “ball” and “center of (fiery) energy.” See Lawrence M. Krauss, Atom: An Odyssey from the Big Bang to Life on Earth...And Beyond (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2001); Leon Lederman with Dick Teresi, The God Particle: If the Universe is the Answer, What is the
III.2.1. The Cosmogonic Egg and the Primordial Atom

Ancient tradition described the primordial atom, in which everything (including God) was originally contained and out of which everything (including God) emerged, as an egg. This ‘Cosmogonic’ or ‘Mundane’ Egg symbolized the key to the mystery of Origins. Manley P. Hall, world-renowned scholar of the Occult, in his book MAN: The Grand Symbol of The Mysteries, observes:


The whole mystery of origin and destiny is concealed in the symbolism of that radiant gold egg…It was declared that such as understood this mystery had risen above all temporal limitations.

Madame H.P. Blavatsky, Matriarch of Theosophy, says also:

‘The ‘Mundane Egg’ is, perhaps, one of the most universally adopted symbols…Whence this universal symbol? The Egg was incorporated as a sacred sign in the cosmogony of every people on the Earth, and was revered both on account of its form and its inner mystery…It was known as that which represented most successfully the origin and secret of being. The gradual development of the imperceptible germ within the closed shell; the inward working, without apparent outward interference of force, which from a latent ‘nothing’ produced an active ‘something,’ needing naught save heat; and which, having gradually evolved into a concrete, living creature, broke its shell, appearing to outward senses of all a self-generated and self-created being-must have been a standing miracle from the beginning.’

The Egg symbolized prima material, that ‘primeval substance in creation,’ or ‘progenitive germ,’ from which the world evolved. As Philip Freud pointed out in 1965, this cosmogonic egg is the same as the ‘primordial atom’ of modern scientific theories on the origin of the universe. In fact, the primordial atom, first proposed by Abbé Georges Lemaître, physicist at Louvain University, has since been called by scientists “Lemaître’s Egg” in recognition of its relation to the cosmogonic egg of the ancients. Isaac Asimov, for example, in his Atom: Journey Across the Subatomic Cosmos, describes the beginning of the universe from a scientist’s perspective in a way that radically approaches the beginning as described by these ancient religious texts:

Manley P. Hall, MAN - The Grand Symbol of the Mysteries, 1972, 69.
Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, 202.
Hellbom, “Creation Egg.” 64.
Freund, Myths of Creation, 49.
Ibid., 180.

there was a time when the matter and energy of the Universe were literally squashed together into one exceeding dense mass. (The Belgian astronomer Abbé Georges Henri Lemaître) called it the cosmic egg…If we consider the situation before the atom was formed, we might visualize a vast illimitable sea of nothingness…The nothingness contains energy…The Pre-Univers…had energy, and although all of its properties were otherwise those of a vacuum, it is called a false vacuum. Out of this false vacuum, a tiny point of matter appears where the energy, by blind forces of random changes, just happens to have concentrated itself sufficiently for the purpose. In fact, we might imagine the illimitable false vacuum to be a frothing, bubbling mass, producing bits of matter here and there as the ocean waves produce foam.

Here we have a world-renowned scientist describing the precosmic world in terms of a primordial ocean of matter and a cosmogonic egg, language deriving from the ancient mythic tradition.


Figure 44

Newtonian Atom
Two different Eggs were recognized in ancient tradition. The first, the Universal Egg, was the black womb of Space in which existed that Primordial Energy – the Supreme All. The Sanskrit Book of Dzyan refers to it as the Eternal Egg. Within this Universal Egg, the Supreme All self-fecundated and produced the Mundane or Golden Egg, called “Golden” because the
sparking of the Atom was the first visible manifestation of Light.

Proof that in fact the Golden Egg is a symbol for the A-tom from which the creator-God physically emerged is found everywhere. The Egyptian Ritual speaks of the “egg conceived at the hour of the great one of the Dual Force” (Sec. V, 2.3). The “Dual Force” is no doubt reference to the positive/negative polarity of the Primordial Energy which gave birth to the protons (+) and electrons (-) of the Atom. Occult philosophy depicts this Golden Egg with two poles, a positive on top and a negative on bottom.\textsuperscript{884} The ancient Persians depicted two serpents, labeled Good and Evil, contending for the Mundane Egg (Figure 45). Hall notes that the ancients used the serpent to represent Electricity or Force.

\textsuperscript{882} Blavatsky, Secret Doctrine, I: 28.

\textsuperscript{883} Hall, MAN - The Grand Symbol of the Mysteries, 72.

\textsuperscript{884} Blavatsky, Secret Doctrine, I: 556.

Electricity was commonly symbolized by the serpent because of its motion. Electricity passing between the poles of a spark gap is serpentine in its motion. Force projected through the atmosphere was called The Great Snake. Being symbolic of universal force, the serpent was emblematic of both good (positive) and evil (negative).\textsuperscript{885}

\textbf{Figure 45}

Mundane Egg of the ancient Persians

The two serpents contending for the Egg are therefore symbolic of the contending protons (+) and electrons (-) within the Atom. The Orphic Mysteries depict the Egg with the Great Serpent coiled around it (Figure 46) like a mother snake coiled around its recently laid egg. This Great Serpent, Hall informs us, represents the “Fiery Creative Spirit,” the God Force from which the Atom or Egg sparked.

\textsuperscript{885} Hall, Secret Teachings of All Ages, LXXXVIII.

\textbf{Figure 46}

The Mundane Egg (Primordial Atom) born from the Cosmic Serpent (Divine Spirit/Latent Energy/God-Force

III.2.2. The Primordial Atom and the Birth of God

According to these ancient texts this ‘egg’ or atom (also depicted as a lotus plant)\textsuperscript{886} began rotating and moving ‘on the waters,’ which movement originated time.\textsuperscript{887} Within this atom the creator-deity now resided (Figure 47) and, eventually, from this atom he emerged as a luminous anthropos (man),\textsuperscript{888} the so-called sun-god: AtumRē# of Egypt (Figure 48)\textsuperscript{889} and PrajāpatiBrahmā of India (Figure 49).\textsuperscript{890}

\textsuperscript{886} See Bosch, Golden Germ, 56-57.

\textsuperscript{887} On the birth of time in Egyptian cosmogonic tradition see Dunand and Zivie-Coche, Gods and Men in Egypt, 64-70.

there was in the beginning neither heaven nor earth, and nothing existed except a boundless primeval mass of water which was shrouded in darkness and which
contained within itself the germs or beginnings, male and female, of everything which was to be in the future world. The divine primeval spirit which formed an essential
part of the primeval matter felt within itself the desire to begin the work of creation, and its word woke to life the world, the form and shape of which it had already
depicted to itself. The first act of creation began with the formation of an egg out of the primeval water, from which broke forth Rā, the immediate cause of all life upon
earth.” Quoted from Budge, Egyptian Book of the Dead, xcvii. See also Zandee, “The Birth-Giving CreatorGod,” 182: “Atum is ‘complete’ as an androgynous god. He
unites within himself masculinity and femininity. He possesses all conditions to bring forth the all out of him. He was a Monad and made himself millions of creatures which
he contained potentially in himself. He was the one who came into being of himself (Éprs.f), who was the creator of his own existence, the causa sui.” In a New
Kingdom royal inscription Atum is described as he “who generates himself within the egg.” See Assmann, Egyptian Solar Religion, 112. Another image used by the
Egyptians to depict the primordial atom out of which the creator-god emerged is the primordial mound (benben) that raised out of the primordial waters at the beginning of
creation (see Clifford, Creation Accounts, 105-6). This mound was the “first solid matter” brought from the bottom of the waters and it was identified with Atum himself
(Traunecker, Gods of Egypt, 77; Irwin, “‘Asokan’ Pillars,” 92. On the Primordial Mound see further idem, “The Sacred Anthill and the Cult of the Primordial Mound,” HR 21 [1982]: 339-360; idem, “The Mystery of the (Future)
Buddha’s First Words,” Annali Instituto Orientale di Napoli 41 [1981]: 622-664). It is no coincidence that this primordial atom is identified with and personifies Atum, the
god born from that atom.

Indic Creator God Brahmā before emerging out of the Cosmogenic Egg/Primordial Atom (from Manly P. Hall, MAN: Grand Symbol of the Mysteries). The Indic text,

The Laws of Manu, relates:

This universe was enveloped in darkness, unperceived, undistinguishable…Then the irresistible, self-existent Lord…seeking to produce various creatures…deposited in
them (the primordial waters) a seed (quark). This (seed) became a golden egg (atom), resplendent as the sun, in which he himself was born as Brahmain, the progenitor of
the word…Being formed by that first cause…that [Man (Puruṣa)] is called Brahmain…This egg, after the creator had inhabited (it) for a thousand years…burst open, and
Brahmain, issuing forth by meditation, commenced the work of creation.

This brilliantly luminous body proved lethal to his future creation. His

The ‘bursting forth’ of the Creator God out of the egg/atom signifies that the atoms were used to build up the Creator God’s

body.

When the creator-god first emerged, the ancient sources tell us, he lacked the black-body. Indeed, he was light that
separated from and emerged out of the darkness. His body, we are told, was originally a body of light described variously
as white gold, yellow gold or red gold (Figure 51). The brilliance of this body surpassed that of the sun, which the creator-deity (sun-god) created only as a sign and a ‘vicar.’ This brilliantly luminous body proved lethal to his future creation. His
creatures were perishing at the sight of it and his cosmos was being scorched. The creator-deity decided to cloak his luminosity in a bodily ‘veil,’ which he made from the primordial waters out of which he emerged. That primordial matter, black and aqueous, became the substance of his new body, which he wore over the luminous form like a garment, concealing its brilliance.

See Ringgren, “Light and Darkness,” 141-42

the gods,” “white gold” with a body “cast …from gold.” See Assmann, Egyptian Solar Religion, 27, 94, 95.

See Budge, Egyptian Book of the Dead, xcvi.
Min, Egyptian black ‘creator-god par excellence’, who emerged from the primordial dark waters, from which his black body was formed.

Bṛhmaṇa 20.14.2; Ēg Veda 10.125.3; Jaininiyā-Brāhmaṇa 2.252 (Vāk as primordial cow); Bosch, Golden Germ, 52-53. On Vāk as primordial matter see Nagar, Image of Brāhmaṇa, viii; Joshi, “Prajāpati,” 113. On Prajāpati-Brahmā’s copulation with Vāk as a metaphor for the reuniting of fire (breath) with water see Mishra, Brahmatā-Worship. 11. On the fiery breath (Agni) and the waters see further Kuiper, “Golden Germ,” 27-30; Bosch, Golden Germ, 57-62.

In Egypt, Rē# transforms (Ēp)r his luminous body into a black body symbolized by the gods Atum and Osiris, both of whom had black bulls as their attribute animal; on Atum’s black bull Mnēvis see George Hart, The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses [2nd edition; London and New York: Routledge, 2005] 95 s.v. Mnēvis; Ions, Egyptian Mythology, 40. On Rē# darkening and transforming into Atum see See Ringgren, “Light and Darkness,” 150; Karl W. Luckert, Egyptian Light and Hebrew Fire. Theological and Philosophical Roots of Christendom in Evolutionary Perspective (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 73. Most often, Rē#’s black body is identified with the black god Osiris (Figure 16), who represents the black primordial waters of Nun; see Chassinat, “Mise a Mort Rituelle.” On black Osiris as the netherworld body of Rē# see Hasenfratz, “Patterns of Creation,” 176; Jan Assmann, The Search for God in Ancient Egypt, translated from the German by David Lorton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001) 41; idem, Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt, translated from the German by David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) 188; Clark, Myth and Symbol, 158; Martin Lev and Carol Ring, “Journey of the Night Sun,” Parabola 8 (1983): 14-18; Albert Churchward, Signs & Symbols of Primordial Man: The Evolution of Religious Doctrines from the Eschatology of the Ancient Egyptians (Brooklyn: A&B Publishers Group, 1994, reprint ) 63-66, 274-6, 322.

But some of this brilliance shown through the hair-pores of the new black body,897 and this produced a dark-blue iridescence or glow. The result was the saphhiric body of the creator-deity.898 While the luminous, fiery body was ‘terrible’ and destructive, the blue-black ‘saphhiric’ body was beautiful and auspicious, a mercy to the creatures.899 “Blue as the sky, dark as the raincloud…Viṣṇu was the personification of beauty.”900 The act of cloaking the divinely luminous form in a body was considered a divine sacrifice901 - a sacrifice that resulted in the first human being (Allah The Original Man) and which permitted the creation of the (more densely) material world.902

897 See above and also Mahābhārata 5.129.11 which mentions “rays of light, like the sun’s, [shining] from [KūBōa’s]very pores.” Translated James W. Lane, Visions of God: Narratives of Theophany in the Mahābhārata (Vienna 1989) 134. Now KūBōa, whose name means ‘black’ (A.L. Basham, The Wonder that was India [London: Sidgwick and Jackson 1954] 205) is in many ways the paradigmatic blue-black god. As David R. Kinsky, The Sword and the Flute: Kaśi and Kaśesi, Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) noted, KūBōa with his blue-black complexion is the “quintessence of divine beauty”: “His appearance is redeeming in itself…Over and over again we read of his luminous dark complexion, large dark eyes, black curly hair. For devotees of KūBōa the image of their blue lord is the quintessence of divine beauty. The Brāhmaṇa-vaiṣṇavatapurāṇa...describes KūBōa as emanating a blinding light...But KūBōa’s devotees see within that dazzling light to an even more dazzling and redeeming image of their darling…(the) lovely image of KūBōa located in the center of this light. He is blue like a new cloud.” The “dazzling light” is the light emanating through the hair-pores from the dangerously luminous form within the black body’s ‘Universal Form’, vivarāśāśāṇana; see Bhagavadgītā 11; Lane, Visions of God, 135-141. The description “luminous dark complexion” nicely captures the divine paradox.

898 Thus Viṣṇu is “dark-hued, cloud-hued, sapphire-hued, gem-hued, ocean-hued and seahued” (See S. Settar, “Vishnu-Krishna in Namavarali’s Tiruvavumoli [C.7th Cent. A.D.]”) in G. Kamalakar and M. Veerender [edd.], Vishnu in Art, Thought, and Literature [Hyderabad: Birla Archaeological & Cultural Research Institute, 1993] 225) and Varūṇa, the “cloud-dark Lord of aquatic creatures,” when he appeared to Arjuna was “the color of lapis lazuli, lighting up every direction” (Mahābhārata 3.42.5-6). The Viṣṇu of the Purānic Trimūrti or Triad is the creator-god (Prajāpati-)Brahmā with the luminous body cloaked within an aquatic body made from the primordial waters. Therefore, as Viṣṇu, (Prajāpati-)Brahmā is called “he who dwells in the [causal] waters, Nāga.” By assuming this form (Prajāpati-)Brahmā showed mercy on creation. Thus, in his ‘Viṣṇu’ form he is called auspicious. On Viṣṇu see Dāniačou, Myths and Gods of India, Chapters Eleven through Fourteen; Arvid Sharma, “The Significance of Viṣṇu Reclining on the Serpent,” Religion 16 (1986): 101-114; Nanidhi Krishna, The Art and Iconography of Viṣṇu-Narayana (Bombay, 1980); Kalpana S. Desai, Iconography of Viṣṇu in (Northern India, Upto the Mediaeval Period) (New Delhi: Aabhinav Publications, 1973); F.B.J Kuiper, “The Three Strides of Viṣṇu in India,” idem, Ancient Indian Cosmogony, 41-55; Bhattachari, Indian Theogy, Chapter Fourteen; Martin, Gods of India, Chapter Third; J. Gonda, Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism (Utrecht; N.V.A. Oosthoek’s Uitgevers Mij, 1954). See also Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, “The Submarine Mare in the Mythology ofŚiva,” JRAS 1971 9-27 and below. In ancient Egyptian tradition see e.g. the famous story of the Withdrawal of Rē# to Heaven. After incurring most humans with his fiery fury personified as his daughter, the ferocious lioness Sekhmet (who, incidentally, got out of hand), Rē# re-entered the primordial water (he mounted the back of Nut-Nun personified as the primordial cow). He thus concealed his luminous body within Nut-Nun. He is now “he” who conceals his image in the body of Nut, “who conceals his image in his heaven.” (P. Leiden 1 344 v501.4 and vii.7 in J. Zandee, Der Amunhymus des Papyrus Lekser 1 344, 3 vols. [Leiden, 1992]). See also Assmann, Egyptian Solar Religion, 70-72. By concealing his luminous body within the body of Nut, Rē# becomes the sapphire-bodied Amun-Re, described as “beautiful youth of purest lapis lazuli (Ēw-nfr nēśbd-mēs) whose body is heaven” (ḥt. K nwt).” See above n. 31. In the Leiden Papyrus stored at the museum in Leiden (see Adolf Erman, “Der Leidener Amons-hymnus,” Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 11 [1923]: 66ff) Rē#’s dangerously luminous body is described as his ‘secret form’ hidden within Amun (70-73). On the myth of Rē#’s Withdrawal see Robert A. Armour, Gods and Worship. 11. On the fiery breath (Agni) and the waters see further Kuiper, “Golden Germ,” 27-30; Bosch, Golden Germ, 57-62.

899 Siva too has two forms, his fiery form born from the golden egg called his ‘terrible form’ and his aquatic form described as “auspicious.” See Mahābhārata 13.146.4; Brāhmaṇa-a Purāṇa. See O’Flaherty, “Submarine Mare.”


901 According to the cosmogonic account of Berossos, priest of Bēl-Marduk of Babylon, published in Greek ca. 250 BC, after cleaving the villainous primordial water (Gk. Ormoka; Baby. Tiamat) and creating the cosmos, Bēl-Marduk’s luminosity was unbearable for living creatures who were therefore perishing. Bēl-Marduk thus ordered a god to cut off his (i.e. Bēl-Marduk’s) head (self-sacrifice); his blood was mixed with earth to form men and animals that could survive. See K.K.A. Venkatachari, “Babylonian, Assyrian and Other Accounts,” in Dange, Myths of Creation, 36-37. See also Brian K. Smith, “Sacrifice and Being: Prajapati’s Cosmic
This blue-black body of the deity was the most arcane secret of the ancient mysteries. In Egypt it was the mystery of the unity of Rē# and his black body Osiris (Figure 52). As one text from a New Kingdom royal tomb associated with the mystery rites reveals: “It is a great mystery, it is Rē# and Osiris. He who reveals it will die a sudden death.” According to the Book of Gates this is the “Mystery of the Great God.” In Vedic India, “the central theme of what can be denoted by no other term than Aryan mysticism” is the secret of Agni (fire) hidden in water (VāruÖa), viz. the mystery of the luminous Prajāpati-Brahmā (creator-god) hidden within the black and aqueous body. The Akkadian ‘bull-ritual’ likewise associated the pelt of the black bull with the “mystery of Anu, Enlil, Ea(Enki) and of Ninmah,” i.e. the black gods of Sumer/Akkad.

This sacrificial ‘incarnation,’ if you will, is often represented metaphorically as the creator-god (re-)uniting with his wife/daughter, the celestial ocean (primordial matter) depicted as the primordial cow. When Rē# as Bull begets with the Divine Cow, i.e. NutNun, the material world with its planets and humans are produced. Thus, “we are all cattle” (see G.S. Bedagkar, “Egyptian, Hebrew and Greek Accounts,” in Dange, Myths of Creation, 33). Prajāpati-Brahmā, (re-)uniting with Vāk (primordial water/primordial cow), produced the īdāsarvam or “phenomenal, material world,” beginning with Manu, the first human, which is only Prajāpati-Brahmā himself in the phenomenal, material world. Śatapatha-Brāhma 6.6.1.19; 9.4.1.12; J. Gonda, “All, Universe and Totality in the Śatapatha-Brāhma,” Journal of the Oriental Institute 32 (1982): 1-17; Joshi, “Prajāpati in Vedic Mythology and Ritual.”

According to Jan Assmann “the most secret Arcanum known to the mysteries of the solar journey” is “the nocturnal union of Re and Osiris.” Assmann, Egyptian Solar Religion, 28; Idem, Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt, trans. from the German by David Lorton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005) 186. On Osiris as the black body of Rē# see above.

**The Mathematics of the Black God**