

# The Old Arabian Moon Religion And the Mosaic Tradition

(1904)

by

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*Chapter One:*  
The Conception of God

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Mythicist Papers

*Eugene, Oregon*

(2011)

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## Foreword

The pages translated here are now over one century old. Footnotes have been added to help update the text, signed “RS.” Footnotes that do not have that signature are in the original text. Despite more recent work, the essential concepts exposed by Nielsen so long ago still obtain. They are important toward an understanding of ‘lunar’ religion and its attendant proto-gnostic associations—elements which have heretofore been quite ignored and yet which are critical towards an understanding of Christianity. Certainly, a paucity of scholarship has characterized this subfield (cf. the scant bibliography on p. 30) whose importance for Middle Eastern religion (and for the emergence of Christianity) has not been generally recognized.

At times this is a free translation, for Nielsen’s often long and convoluted German sentences lend themselves poorly to direct English translation. Nevertheless, I have at all times attempted to convey the sense of the original to the greatest extent possible.

The original pagination is indicated in brackets, e.g. [23]. Rarely, a few words of clarification have been added within the text. Such words are in brackets. Headings have been added for clarity.

It has been my aim to highlight sometimes surprising parallels between pre-Israelite South Arabian religion and Christianity. Those parallels are brought out especially in my footnotes. A footnote is no place for extended discussion, but can merely indicate in the briefest way a path for further investigation. Together with the text, some of the footnotes (especially those numbered from 20 on) signal the following:

- the link between the planet Mercury and the various names for the ‘Son of God’
- Mercury, the Egyptian Thoth, and the Greek Hermes
- Mercury and ‘hidden knowledge’
- The moon ‘hidden’ for three sacred days each month
- the lunar god of love, *Wadd*, is the divine ‘friend’ (*dwd*, ‘*Amm*)
- the god *Nkrh* and the sacred meal, sacrifice, and healing
- Parallels between the sky god Marduk and Jesus
- The ‘only-begotten,’ human messiah in Sabaeen religion
- Hammurabi, Harran, Nabonidus and the lunar-solar conflict
- The moon-worshipping Harranians later known as followers of John the Baptist

—René Salm

## Character list

’	= “a”	(Heb. <i>alef</i> )
‘	= (stop)	(Heb. <i>ayin</i> )
ĥ	= “ch”	(Heb. <i>het</i> )
š	= “ts”	(Heb. <i>tsade</i> )
š̄	= “sh”	(Heb. <i>shin</i> )
ṭ	= “th”	(Heb. <i>tav</i> )

Long vowels are marked by a superscript macron.

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## INTRODUCTION

[1] In the southwestern corner of the large Arabian peninsula—presently the Turkish province of Yemen<sup>1</sup>—states flourished in pre-Christian eras with cultures as brilliant as their powers. Legendary riches and auspicious political ties gave this portion of Arabia the cognomen “fortunate” [*felix*] in ancient times. The reasons for those riches were certainly related to trade. While Egyptians and Babylonians owed the wealth of their lands to cultivation, the South Arabians were principally merchants. Trade was the vital nerve which imported Indian luxury goods by sea, and in return exported indigenous products—gold, incense, and so on—to India on the one hand, and northwards along the Red Sea on the other hand, via West Arabian caravan roads and ultimately to the empires around the Mediterranean Sea.

South Arabian culture began to decline only with the emergence of a direct water route between the Egyptian harbors on the Mediterranean Sea and India, at which time the land-based warehouses were entirely bypassed. The proud palaces and temples of the south began to decay, the manmade irrigation works to fall into disrepair, and the South Arabians to emigrate northwards in droves. [2] The inland road which once brought fortune mediated the end of a brilliant and very ancient culture.

This decline occurred long before the turn of the era, and even in classical Greek and Roman times the blossoming of South Arabia was a lost greatness enshrined in tradition with all manner of pretty legends and fairytales. Relevant passages in classical literature—passages which might shed a little light on the old South Arabian culture—are scant and of small value. Even after the time of Mohammad, when the northern Arabs began to excel in the writing of history and produced the magnificent culture that we have conventionally called ‘arabism,’ the ancient Arabian civilization was completely lost. For, in their fanatical struggle against the older religions, the Muslims sought to destroy all remains from “the time of unbelief.”

Only in our time, at the end of the eighteenth century, would numerous treasures of old Arabia be discovered by European civilization—mostly as a result of the danish Niebuhr expedition.<sup>2</sup> Ancient monuments from the little-known soil of South Arabia came to light and gave notice that here was once a very special world. We owe a debt of gratitude also to British surveys of the coastline conducted over the past three decades, as well as to intrepid researchers—above all Halevy<sup>3</sup> and Glaser<sup>4</sup>—who discovered over 2,000 original South Arabian inscriptions. [3] Thanks to the subsequent indefatigable efforts of various European scholars, the old culture which has lain dormant in the desert sands for over two thousand years is now finally coming to life once again.

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<sup>1</sup> Now the independent country of Yemen.

<sup>2</sup> Carsten Niebuhr, *Beschreibung von Arabien* (Kopenhagen 1772). I. Bd: *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und anderen umliegenden Ländern*, 1774. II Bd: 1778. III Bd: 1837.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Halévy, “Rapport sur une mission archéologique dans le Yémen.” *Journ. Asiat.*, Sixième Série, Tome XIX:8–60. Paris 1872.

<sup>4</sup> Eduard Glaser, *Meine Reise durch Arhab und Hâschid*. Petermanns, Gotha 1884–86.

Of course, many of these texts have not been published.<sup>5</sup> Of those that have, many are full of gaps and unreadable. The alphabet is certainly established, as are the most important grammatical and syntactic elements. Though the language is a near relation to the later North Arabian, many words and obscure points mock the abilities of the investigator, especially in the cultic inscriptions. A minaeen-sabaeen grammar lies on the table,<sup>6</sup> yet it lacks a lexicon and a reference to collected texts. The study of South Arabian inscriptions is still in its infancy.

From what we know at this time, we may provisionally say that the South Arabian states reached a mature culture fairly early, [4] one which influenced Egypt and Babylon but little. Four great South Arabian entities are thus far attested. In the fertile depression of the South Arabian Gôf lay the capital of the so-called minaeen kingdom, whose capital was Qarnaw (modern Ma'in).<sup>7</sup> Its hegemony extended far to the north. The entire caravan route to Ma'an near Petra was apparently under minaeen protection. At least, the inscriptions found in El-'Ula betray minaeen control of the region. This northern *Ma'in Musran* is best seen as a northern province or protectorate for the trade route. The minaeen kings—about thirty are now known—ruled in a tranquil political climate and, it would seem, enjoyed friendly relations with their two eastern and southern neighbors, Hadramaut and Qataban—about which we know very little.

We encounter the first sabaeen ruler in the capital Sirwah, to the east of present day Sanaa. Later, the palace was located more to the east, by the Wadi Dhenne near Marib. The king bears the epithet *mkrb* (*mukarrîb* or *makrûb*) in the title "King of Saba," subsequently "King of Saba and Raidân." In the so-called himyarite period the capital was in Zafar, [then in] Sanaa.<sup>8</sup> Locating the center of control near the sea seems to have been related to the opening of a new sea route.

In the last part of the abyssinian period [sic] the inscriptions reveal numerous bloody conflicts.<sup>9</sup> South Arabian culture was in a precipitous decline and a decadence is evident in every domain, not least religious. [5] South Arabia came under Persian rule about 575 CE, and then under North Arabian (muslim) rule fifty years later.

While scholars are unanimous regarding the beginnings of sabaeen culture about 800 BCE, there are differing views concerning the period of minaeen dominance. The general (but informal) opinion until 1889 was that the minaeens simultaneously exercised dominion in Yemen with the sabaeans. After the revelations of Glaser—and,

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<sup>5</sup> Among the first publications: Osiander, ZDMG 19 (1865)159–293; Halévy, Journ. Asiat., 6 Ser. Tome 19 (1872) 129–266, 489–547; J. Mordtmann and D. Müller, *Sabäische Denkmäler* (Vienna 1883); E. Glaser, *Mitteilungen* (Self-publication, 1886); fascicles of the Glaser Collection from the Br. Museum are in *Corpus Inscript. Semit.*, Pars IV (1889–1900).

<sup>6</sup> F. Hommel, *Südarabische Chrestomathie*. Munich 1893.

<sup>7</sup> Presently NW Yemen.

<sup>8</sup> The Himyarite Kingdom or Himyar (in Arabic مملكة حِمْيَر *mamlakat himyâr*), anciently called Homerite Kingdom by the Greeks and the Romans, dated from 110 BCE and first took the the ancient city of Zafar as its capital, then what is modern Sanaa. The Himyarites conquered neighboring Saba (Sheba) in c. 25 BCE, Qataban c. 200 CE and Hadramaut c. 300 CE.

<sup>9</sup> The Aksumites of Ethiopia invaded across the Red Sea for the first time in 340 CE, making use of the constant intra-tribal conflict between Hamdan and Himyar. The subsequent period witnessed a great deal of turmoil and cost the Yemeni people their independence. In the fifth century, several kings of Himyar are known to have converted to Judaism.

based upon him, those of Hommel, Winckler, and Weber—the general thrust of the evidence indicates that the minaeen kingdom began sometime before the sabaeen, lasted at least six hundred years, and was destroyed by sabaeans coming down from the north. Therefore, the known minaeen inscriptions must go back to the mid-second millennium BCE, as do also the related Qatabanian and Hadramautic inscriptions. However the minaeen kingdom is yet much older, for we still do not know all the kings' names, and the oldest inscriptions already reveal a highly developed culture and an elaborate state apparatus.<sup>10</sup>

[6] When we now turn to religious matters, which are the subject of the following pages, we note that almost all the collected inscriptions are in a sense 'religious,' in that their outward form is dedicatory. There is a typical formula: "N. consecrates to god G. the following, in thanks that G. hears N. and gives N. good fortune, etc." After a circumstantial reason for the consecration, there usually follows a king's name [which can often be dated]. The inscription ends with a devotional invocation to the gods. Because its form is stereotypical, the inscription can offer only a glimpse into general religious matters, such as the god's manifestation and the most important cultic customs. The numerous personal names may, in fact, be the most revealing factor as regards the inner religious life of the time. Many categories of religious texts are not yet known, specifically myths, hymns, rituals, those related to the calendar, and such. The religious domain has not been investigated by scholars to the same extent as the secular. One exception is Hommel. Through his analysis of personal names, and his determination of the ways in which the gods were manifested, he has laid two cornerstones in South Arabian religious research.

In the following, we shall attempt to place flesh and blood on the dry religio-historical skeleton of the inscriptions through other, related sources. Similar religious streams appeared very early in cuneiform literature, sometimes through direct arab influence. Those influences on later semitic religions are also valuable, for the ancient conception of divinity left very deep traces.

## THE PERSONAL NAMES

We encounter the oldest arab religion through personal names. [7] Ranke has shown that the ancient semitic personal name is typically a statement whose content reveals a religious idea.<sup>11</sup> In this way the religious conceptions of the ancient semites have been transmitted to us. Even though, in naming their children, the ancients certainly gave expression to contemporary religious notions, we must not forget that naming is always conservative. It consults well-known names and pre-existing custom. Thus, religiously speaking, naming looks backwards in time.<sup>12</sup>

A certain class of South Arabian personal names differentiates itself from others, partly due to inner characteristics, but sometimes—and more often in the older texts—obviously. In these names one suspects that information regarding earlier religion has

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<sup>10</sup> On this question see the older literature in Weber, "Das Alter des minäischen Reiches," *Mitteil. D. Vorderas. Gesellsch.*, 1901/1.—RS

<sup>11</sup> H. Ranke, *Die Personennamen in den Urkunden der Hammurabidynastie*. Vol. I. Munich, 1902:47.

<sup>12</sup> For example, in present religions we still find many heathen names.

been transmitted. This suggestion is confirmed by the fact that, in arab personal names, we perceive reflections of documents which almost exclusively derive from the Hammurabi dynasty of Babylon.<sup>13</sup> In this way—quite apart from the age of minaeen inscriptions—a naming system is attested which goes back to the second or even the third pre-Christian millennium. We encounter such names not only on Babylonian soil, but also in the Syrian, Palestinian, and southern arab regions. [8] Therefore, the naming system which we are discussing is not specifically ‘south arab.’ Rather, it is ‘old arab.’

Hommel, in particular, has analyzed the myriad names occurring in the South Arabian inscriptions from a linguistic standpoint. He recognized the religio-historical value of those names and, furthermore, characterized their religious content as “unique in the naming conventions of ancient peoples.” Giesebrecht sees “a genuine and original product of the semitic spirit” in the examples furnished by Hommel, while Ranke points to “an inner connection between god and man” expressed in the west-semitic names, as opposed to those genuinely Babylonian.<sup>14</sup>

Even though the above-mentioned class of names is distinct from a religious point of view, it can be analyzed into various groups for more precise analysis. While a chronological stratification of those groups is difficult given our current knowledge, they can be distinguished according to their differing religious content.

#### *Names with “god”*

The simplest names are those containing the usual Semitic word for god, EL or ILU, which functions as the subject of the statement (to which an indicative predicate is added). In this group we find, for example:

<i>jahwi-ilu</i>	He exists-God
<i>waddada-ilu</i>	He lives-God
<i>şadaq-ilu</i>	Righteous is God
<i>jadhkur-ilu</i>	Remembers [does] God
<i>jasma'-ilu</i>	Hears [does] God
<i>kariba-ilu</i>	Blesses [does] God
<i>wahaba-ilu</i>	Gave [did] God

In inverted order:

<i>il(ī)-jada'a</i>	(My) God is Knowing
<i>il(ī)-sami'a</i>	(My) God has Heard
<i>il(ī)-kariba</i>	(My) God has Blessed
<i>il(ī)-amara</i>	(My) God has Commanded
<i>il(ī)-amina</i>	(My) God is Faithful

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<sup>13</sup> These interesting names have been formally differentiated from genuinely Babylonian names especially by Pognon, Sayce, Hommel, Winckler, and Ranke.

<sup>14</sup> F. Hommel, *Die altisraelitische Überlieferung*. Munich, 1897:78–87; D. Giesebrecht, *Die alttestamentliche Schätzung des Gottesnamens*. Königsberg, 1901:102–13, 140–44; Ranke, *Die Personennamen in den Urkunden der Hammurabidynastie*. Munich, 1902:49.

<i>il(ī)-sa'ada</i>	(My) God has Given Luck
<i>il(ī)-padaja</i>	(My) God has Saved
<i>il(ī)-wahaba</i>	(My) God has Given
<i>il(ī)-rapa'a</i>	(My) God has Healed
<i>il(ī)-radsawa</i>	(My) God is Merciful

Those names with the divine designation ILU are to be separated from the rest, for they are not specifically Arabic but also Babylonian, as attested in the earliest Babylonian inscriptions. [10] Examples are:

<i>ilu-magir</i>	(My) God is Merciful
<i>ilu-idinna</i>	(My) God Gives
<i>ilu-uṣrani</i>	(My) God Guards Me
<i>ilu-damiq</i>	(My) God is Merciful
<i>ilu-ušallim</i>	(My) God Gives Peace
<i>ilu-abī</i>	(My) God is My Father
<i>ilu-usātī</i>	(My) God is My Foundation
<i>ilu-tappī</i>	(My) God is My Companion
<i>ilu-išme-ḥanī</i>	(My) God Hears the Suffering
<i>mannu-balu-ili</i>	Who (Can do Anything) Without God?

These straightforward names belong to an old heritage held by all semitic peoples in common. We encounter them throughout the semitic lands as well as in the oldest documents. Their conception of divinity is very simple, in no way concretized or associated with anything material. Nothing in them indicates that their god's range of activity is restricted to a particular heavenly body, place, or people, or that we are dealing with as astral, local, or national deity. They speak of "god," never of "gods." [11] Instead of external particulars regarding god's activity, we encounter a panorama of moral, personal qualities which characterize the divine conception and populate the above predicates. God is true love [*gerechte Liebe*], good, merciful, beneficent, and so on. He is a personal god, for he knows, remembers, hears, etc. He is a just god, who confers his laws upon men. Above all, however, he is a loving god, an ally of man through covenant, and one who bestows upon him peace. The divine conception focusses on the words *ilu-abi*—"God is my Father."<sup>15</sup> God is ethical, personal, and simple to describe. He is trustworthy.

Among these old semitic names there is, however, a smaller group in which the predicate describes the external activity of god according to various points of view:

<i>ilu-bani</i>	God Creates
<i>ilu-šariḥa</i>	God Excels

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Mt. 7:9–11: "What man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?... How much more will your father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"



<i>ilu-japi'a</i>	God Shines
<i>ilu-ma-nabata</i>	God Flashes
<i>ilu-dharaḥa</i>	God Illumines

God is the creator, he who enables earthly life to prosper. Though this activity occurs through the meditation of heavenly bodies, the powers do not reside in those bodies but belong to god. Through them “he” shines and illumines. It is god who shines through in the splendor of light.

These two conceptions of god [interior and astral] convey semitic belief *in nuce*, as we are able to elucidate it in the old names and from the state religions of history. Indeed, the two conceptions are elaborated in various regions, coupled with particular geographic, climatic, and cultural aspects.

#### *Names with abstract concepts*

[12] When we put aside this division between two classes of pan-semitic names, and turn to the other questions which have occupied investigators of west semitic and arab naming customs, we find that—instead of the simple characterization of “god”—we have on the one hand an abstract, personal conception of divinity, and on the other hand a relational (familial) conception. In clarification, we begin with examples of the former:

<i>Sa'ada-wadd</i>	Beneficent is Love
<i>Ṣidqī-amara</i>	My Righteousness has Commanded
<i>Dhimrī-'alaja</i>	My Protection is Exalted
<i>Jith'ī-amara</i>	My Salvation has Commanded
<i>Wir'ī-amara</i>	My Fear has Commanded

In the first class of common semitic names given earlier, we saw that explicit ethical abstractions gained the upper hand and functioned as equivalents for the concept “god”—at least, they substituted for that word. God loves mankind, and it was possible to simply call him “love” itself (*waddada-ilu*). In such a name the depiction of a loving god emerges powerfully into the foreground of religious thought to the exclusion of other attributes. Similarly, in the name *ṣadaq-ilu*, the conception of a righteous god was embraced by the masses of people to the point that god could simply be equated with righteousness. The name *ṣidqī*, above, shows that the divine righteousness is in covenant with the human being—“My” righteousness has commanded. Thus, we are speaking of a personal righteousness, one which “remembers” (*ṣidqī-dhakara*), which “knows” (*ṣidqī-jada'a*), and which commands me to do that which is “right” (*ṣidqī-amara*). As a punishing and rewarding righteousness, god is the occasion for my fear, *wir'ī*. [13] As comforting and forgiving love, he is principally a protector god allied with mankind—“My Protection” (*dhimrī*) and “My Salvation” (*jith'ī*). These latter are names of the divinity itself and are very frequent. In sum, the basic semitic conception of the divine is characterized on arab soil by a religiosity which is strongly personal. This intimacy is developed further in a personal-ethical direction. The central aspect of god is holy, “true” love, from which derive his other aspects as ally, protector, healer, and savior.

*Names with near family relationships*

The inner connection between god and man takes a signal turn when, instead of abstract concepts, the name of god becomes expressed through actual familial relations:

<i>Ab(ī)-jathu'a</i>	(My) Father has Helped
<i>Ab(ī)-dhamara</i>	(My) Father has Protected
<i>'Amm(ī)-saduqa</i>	(My) Uncle is Righteous
<i>'Amm(ī)-jada'a</i>	(My) Uncle is Knowing
<i>Hâl(ī)-amara</i>	(My) Uncle has Commanded
<i>Dâd(ī)-kariba</i>	(My) Uncle has Blessed
<i>Ah(ī)-kariba</i>	(My) Brother has Blessed

The religious ideas conveyed by this group of names closely approximate the preceding. There is still a compassionate, loving god who cares for me. However, my protection and salvation are now in danger, and so god is ever present to me as a near relative. The names of these family relatives do not so directly arouse religious sentiment as does "father" when applied to god. Yet, we shall see that they gain an added dimension of meaning when coupled with semitic astral religion, which possessed a parallel genealogical system.

As regards the old arab names, they are encountered far and wide in the most dispersed and varied places of South Arabia, Palestine, and Syria, even as the common semitic names (above) are found throughout the semitic world.<sup>16</sup> [14] The old arab names are found, too, in great numbers as foreign imports in Babylonia, side-by-side with authentic Babylonian names. As to their religious content, it makes no difference whether 'god' is local or national. As with the old semitic names, the conception of god in the old arab names is ethical, personal, and even more 'internal.' The latter are evidenced already in inscriptions from the third millennium BCE, a period which has yielded as yet no surviving arab monuments. We must therefore use these inscriptions with caution in the investigation of religio-historical questions, until such time as excavations in the ruins of South Arabian mounds—where certainly much material awaits the archaeologist—bring more historical material to light.

On the other hand, the inscriptional names represent critical evidence of a time that has evaded closer acquaintance. They permit precise study, within the limits that a partial study can allow. Those names are forgotten witnesses to a religion of which we otherwise know very little. They are conservative relics as it were—fossils embedded in a religious stream, now visible long after the stream itself has dried up. A religion evolves, and the particulars of its ancient evolution are necessarily hidden to us. Nevertheless, the remains that do survive give us ample clues to begin exploration into the old semitic and arab religions. [15] Through personal names—and aided by other evidence—we can quite precisely delineate, for example, the fundamental Babylonian conception of divinity. This teaches us that semitic personal names are valuable and reliable indicators of semitic religion.

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<sup>16</sup> See the personal names in Hommel, *Süd-arabische Chrestomathie*, 129–36; Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Chaldäisches Handwörterbuch*; Ulmer, *Die semitischen Eigennamen im Alten Testament*, Teil 1 (Leipzig, 1901).

*Babylonian personal names*

In contradistinction to the abstract arab conception of god, the Babylonian personal names reveal concrete astral divinities—most frequently *Šamaš* and *Sin*, for example:

<i>Ilu-Šamaš</i>	<i>Sin-ilu</i>
<i>Šamaš-bani</i>	<i>Sin-bani</i>
<i>Ibni-Šamaš</i>	<i>Ibni-Sin</i>
<i>Nūr-Šamaš</i>	<i>Nūr-Sin</i>
<i>Šamaš-muballit</i>	<i>Sin-muballit</i>
<i>Imgur-Šamaš</i>	<i>Imgur-Sin</i>
<i>Šamaš-imguranni</i>	<i>Sin-imguranni</i>
<i>Šamaš-magir</i>	<i>Sin-magir</i>
<i>Šamaš-našir</i>	<i>Sin-našir</i>
<i>Idin-Šamaš</i>	<i>Idin-Sin</i>

The translation:

<i>Šamaš</i> or <i>Sin</i>	is god
“ “	is creator
“ “	made
“ “	is the light
“ “	gives life
“ “	is merciful
“ “	has mercy on me
“ “	is merciful
“ “	protects
“ “	gave

[16] Here, the astral predicates of the old semitic names have become god's names. *Šamaš* and *Sin* now represent the divinity who reveals herself/himself, namely, in the manifest astral power of the sun or the moon. God is still ever personal and ethical—for s/he is merciful, protects, is all-knowing, hears, awakens the dead, gives peace, and so on.<sup>17</sup> Inwardly we are dealing with the same god as before. Now, however, god has two principal names, as the above examples show. The conception of divinity has become astral and dual, corresponding to the two brilliant images of god in the cosmic sky: sun

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<sup>17</sup> The other examples given in the text, “among many similar” are: *Šamaš-abūni*, “*Šamaš* is our Father”; *Sin-kalama-idi*, “*Sin* is all-Knowing”; *Sin-rimēni*, “*Sin* Have Mercy on Me”; *Šamaš-abī*, “*Šamaš* is my Father”; *Sin-šimī*, “*Sin* Hear”; *Šamaš-re‘u*, “*Šamaš* is the Shepherd”; *Sin-mušalim*, “*Sin* Grants Peace”; *Sin-paṭir*, “*Sin* is Savior”; *Šamaš-šar-kitti*, “*Šamaš* is King of Righteousness”; and *Sin-muballit-mētūti*, “*Sin* Gives the Dead Life.”

and moon. A conception of the world which proceeds from god will, therefore, have recourse precisely to the outer manifestations of divinity. It knows only that which it is able to perceive, in the divine manifestations of nature and of the sky.

According to the theistic world conception which lies at the heart of the old semitic personal names, god is now s/he who gives motion to the sun and the moon. In so doing, s/he also divides the year into seasons and months, and makes the day alternate with night. Practically everything that happens on earth goes back to the operations of these two heavenly bodies. The sun, especially, conditions life on earth.

The Babylonian inscriptions go back to the third and fourth pre-Christian millennia and in many ways greatly illuminate contemporary political and religious conditions. As largely a religious development, the personal names can be studied by means of the religious monuments. [17] From them it is evident that, in Babylonian culture, the external, astral, manifestation of divinity governed all of religion and, indeed, all of life from the earliest to the latest period. God revealed himself in the heavens in various forms, and was worshipped in the lights of stars. Hence, the teaching of god was the teaching of the stars, was their forms, movements, and interactions one upon another, upon the earth, and upon people.

We have the sense in Babylonian religion that god is primarily worshipped in solar and lunar forms for, as we have seen, the earth and mankind depend especially on the sun and on the moon. In ordinary life as also in religion these two heavenly objects played the greatest roles. However, in order to understand and correctly evaluate these astral manifestations of divinity, one must keep in mind that the Babylonians and subsequent Mesopotamians worshipped neither the heavenly object nor the astral power of god, both of which are impersonal. Rather, they worshipped a personal, ethical god for whom the stars are the external manifestation. We must be on guard against viewing the sun and moon as impersonal nature-powers, for the impersonal heavenly object was never viewed as 'god.' Such an impression is contradicted by numerous religious monuments. As known to us, the historical religion was shot through with strong ethical prescriptions. The personal, ethical divinity is not ignored in the old semitic names. Quite the contrary, the heavenly bodies are merely considered its image.

[18] The worldview held by the Babylonian people was not an astral cult but an astral religion. The word "cult" often evokes a visible and impersonal sacred organization. However, the learned priests of Mesopotamia were not merely astronomers but in the first instance theologians. The contemporary science was not astronomy but a form of astro-theology. Of course, the emphatically outward expression of the divine conception, and the keen desire to investigate that outward expression—these left their stamp on the entire religious and spiritual fabric of life, left deep and enduring traces on man's subsequent culture, and left a rich record of personal names laden with meaning.

The striking difference between the Babylonian and Arabian religion—which at this time we can describe only rudely—certainly lies in the differing geographical, climatic, and cultural environments. Babylonian civilization was sessile and built on working the soil. As with the Nile valley, so also the extremely fertile valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates afforded man his livelihood and the prerequisites for culture. Babylon was a land of agriculturalists, Arabia a land of herders.

The outwardly demanding life of the farmer offers little luxury for inner religious meditation. On the contrary, it's unending toil depends upon the seasons, upon the 'stars' (particularly the sun). Settlement in one place fostered development of

astrological science.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, the practical results of that science are largely buried in the ruins of Babel and Nineveh. [19] Where they lived on in the religion, we find them veiled in peculiar astro-theological terms.

Thus, Babylonian agricultural life was itself the fertile ground for religious thinking related to the heavenly bodies. Babylonia developed astrology with a zeal unmatched in later times. Its accomplishments, as we shall see, had staying power and the greatest influence on subsequent religious expression. Babylon was famously the foundation of astrology (religious astronomy) and of that star-lore which has survived even into modern times.

In contrast, the western semitic desert-steppe fostered an economy based on herding and on nomadic wandering. The solitude and leisure of the lone herder—in a largely unchanged and uncultivated environment—offered great scope for speculative reflection. This solitary and peripatetic life nourished both a contemplative nature and a religious temperament. In such a stark environment, the conception of the divine was deepened and internalized. The personal link between man and god was strengthened. From that link have arisen reformers and religions which have spread throughout the world. In the west semitic environment religion received the most sublime religious content. But we should not forget that its outward forms—the planetary manifestations of divinity and their workings—nevertheless originated in Babylonia.

## THE SOUTH ARABIAN PANTHEON

### *The threefold and fourfold conception of the divine*<sup>19</sup>

Astrology focussed upon the concrete manifestations of god in the forms of the two brilliant heavenly bodies in the firmament. Nevertheless, religious development reflects a bifurcation—the sun dominated in the East and the moon in the West.

Very early on, the moon rose to a position of predominance in the Arabian religious consciousness. Perhaps at an even earlier date, the sun was similarly distinguished in Babylonia. [20] The reasons are not far to seek. Babylonia was a land of agriculturalists, Arabia a land of nomads and merchant-caravans. The moon played a corresponding role among the traveling nomads and merchants as did the sun for the farmers. After all, the extreme heat of Arabia causes one to travel mostly at night, and without the moon one travels with difficulty. Therefore the Babylonian depended on the sun, the Arabian on the moon. This dependence left a telling impression on religion. Even as the Babylonian farmers worshipped the sun in the cult cities of Larsa and Sippar, so the west-semitic nomads worshipped the moon in the holy cities of Ur, in Harran, in Syria, and (according to Hommel) in South Arabia, where the moon was the principal deity.

In the stereotypical god-lists of South Arabia we generally encounter either three or four deities. Leading the list is always '*Athtar* (male)—the planet Venus. The moon

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<sup>18</sup> Thus, agriculture and astrology were closely related. It is no coincidence that astrology flowered in Babylonia, a region which pioneered irrigation agriculture (see next paragraph).—RS.

<sup>19</sup> We shall see that the differentiation between three and four major divinities hinges upon the acknowledgement and position of Mercury. It is instructive to follow the sometimes equivocal and tentative position of this planet, often identified as the 'hidden' Son of God in the various religious systems. (See n. 21 below.)—RS

(male) is in second place under a variety of names.<sup>20</sup> Lastly we encounter *Šams* (female)—the sun.

In the hadramautic, Qatabanian, and minaeen addresses to the gods we find a fourth deity—Mercury.<sup>21</sup> In sum, while the moon was not the only outward form of the deity in South Arabia, it appears to have been the astral symbol of the highest god. Subordinated to him were other astral deities.

[21] Thus, while polytheism in Babylon was bound up with the seven wandering heavenly bodies (sun, moon, Venus, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), in South Arabia the astral conception of the divine was typically either threefold or fourfold—with moon, sun, and Venus (Mercury) as principal divine symbols. Because the various genus-determinatives were carried through with great faithfulness in the inscriptions,<sup>22</sup> the suspicion is strong that—as in the Babylonian solar religion—so also in Arabian lunar religion the astral divinities were placed in genealogical relation, namely, as father, mother (daughter) and son.

#### *Masculine moon and feminine sun*

Since the sun is universally feminine in moon-religions and is the only feminine divinity in the typical South Arabian pantheon, she is the divine mother. This conforms to the religious conception in the northern Mesopotamian city of Harran.<sup>23</sup> According to Zimmern<sup>24</sup> the Harranian moon-god *Sin* had a spouse, the “queen” *Šarratu* (evidently

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<sup>20</sup> The moon god was variously named “ ‘Almaqah, ‘Ilmaqah, or Ilumquh in Saba. He was the national deity there; in Ma’in and ‘Ausan he was known by the name *Wadd*, in Qataban he was *Amm*, and in Hadramaut, *Sin*.” (Schippmann 91)—RS

<sup>21</sup> According to Hommel, the hadramautic *Hāul* (Heb. *Hōl*) and the Qatabanian *Anbai* (Babylonian *Nabiu/Nabu*) signify Mercury. He is inclined to the opinion that the minaeen *Nkrh* earlier equated to Mercury (*an-Karih*), later to Saturn (*Nakruh*, Bab. *Makrū*).

The identification of *Nkrh* with Mercury may prove of significance. Being the planet closest to the sun, Mercury is rarely seen in the sky, ‘hidden’ as it were in the sun. In ancient Arabian religion Mercury was quintessentially the planet of ‘hidden’ knowledge. Being so close to the sun, it was the “Son of God” (below, pp. 21, 45).

Nevertheless, most scholars identify *Nkrh* with the sun itself, not with Mercury. Interesting parallels exist between the cult of *Nkrh* and later Christianity, especially regarding sacrifice, the sacred meal, and healing. *Nkrh* was the patron god of the Minaean state and his cult was characterized by a grand sacrifice, as well as a sacred meal “to which infirm or dying people came seeking cures or deliverance from suffering.” (Breton 138)—RS

<sup>22</sup> *-dhū, -sū, -hū or dhat, -sā, -hā.*

<sup>23</sup> The heterodox religion of Harran was already well known in antiquity. It became a major factor in history with the accession of Nabonidus to the Babylonian throne (556 BCE). This king, as is well known, confounded his contemporaries (and future historians) by ostensibly rebuking the dominant priesthood of the solar god, Marduk, abandoning Babylon for a decade, and establishing his residence in an Arabian center of the moon religion (Tayma). The subsequent overthrow of Nabonidus was aided not only by the Marduk priesthood, but also by Jewish aristocratic exiles in Babylon who called their new Persian liberator, Cyrus, “messiah.” The latter, of course, famously freed those exiles from bondage and allowed them to return to Jerusalem. Harran would later prove pivotal in the religion of the so-called Sabians—followers of John the Baptist, otherwise known as “Mandeans” (Chwolsohn 182).—RS

<sup>24</sup> Zimmern, H. *Religion und Sprache*. Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1903:363.

the female sun), as well as two children: a daughter *Ištar* (Venus)<sup>25</sup> and a son *Nusku* (Mercury). In Sippar, father-sun *Šamaš* had a “bride” *kallātu*, namely *Aja* (the female moon, according to Hommel), and two constant companions: *Kettu* (feminine) and *Mēšaru* (masculine)—considered his children by Zimmern. The latter are apparently Venus and Mercury. Since Venus is the daughter, Mercury is the “Son of God” in Babylonian religion.

[P. 22] Elsewhere in astral religion, the Moon, Sun, Venus, and Mercury are conceived as a family of four members. A similar view seems to underlie the South Arabian religious conception. Nevertheless, this is not always obvious, for in Arabia we have only one feminine divinity, and in the Minaean and Sabaean systems Mercury has apparently been eliminated and the four divinities have become three:

Father = Moon  
Mother = Sun  
Daughter = Venus  
[Son = Mercury --> Eliminated?] <sup>26</sup>

We are here confronted with a curiosity: the two goddesses (mother and daughter) have merged, resulting in an astral displacement. Both female divinities are now subsumed in the sun. Venus is not feminine, as before, but masculine. Mercury has been eliminated. In genealogical terms, the sun is both mother and daughter, while the two male bodies [moon and Venus] are father and son.

#### THE BABYLONIAN PANTHEON<sup>27</sup>

Babylonian religion offers surprising analogies to the trinity described above. Though the astral conception of divinity was typically sevenfold, the sun, moon, and Venus were in practice the principal divinities of Babylon. From earliest times we encounter the triple symbol for this trinity on cylinder rings, royal statues, and on the so-called boundary stones, where contracts usually include an oath appealing to the threefold divinity. [23] In this trinity Venus is always female. The other two deities are male and designate the father and the son. A certain development is here detectable, for in Babylonian religion *Ishtar* is the actual goddess—now with the dual nature of daughter and mother (analogous to the feminine sun in South Arabia). Mercury does not actually appear in the Babylonian trinity. Instead, one of the two principal planetary bodies [i.e. sun or moon] takes its place as ‘Son of God.’

In order to understand this unique religious development, we must shed further light on the relations between the aforementioned four divinities. The Babylonian designations “father,” “mother,” “daughter,” and “son” for the sun, moon, Venus, and

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<sup>25</sup> If Zimmern is correct, then we have a difference between Harranian religion and that of South Arabia: in the northern locale Venus (*Ishtar*) is female. In the southern he (*Athtar*) is male.

<sup>26</sup> The elimination of Mercury in minaeen and sabaean religion is conjectural. See n. 21, above.—RS

<sup>27</sup> In this sometimes complicated section, Nielsen presents the “reversal” that took place in the Arabian moon religions whereby the male sun became female mother-daughter, and the female moon became male father. For clarity, an Appendix has been added, in which some of the more important pantheons are set forth.—RS

Mercury correspond to the ancient astronomical understanding—based not only on empirical observations, but also on a unified, speculative conception of the world of matter and spirit.

The largest heavenly body and the visible center of of the synodical planetary orbits, the sun was the principal manifestation of the divine and, as such, certainly the starting point of empirical and speculative astronomy. God is the father of the individual, and as the sun he is the father of the world. The earth is illumined by the his infinite solar light. The sun is the visible center of the various planetary orbits and, as such, is the logical center of the world.

[24] Thus, through belief in the great sun god, the Babylonians embraced a heavenly origin for the earth. Their astronomical conception was heliocentric. It was not the earth, as one might think, which had created the sun and the other heavenly bodies. Rather, in the Babylonian account of creation it is the sun *Marduk* who creates the earth, the planets, and the stars. The moon *Ai* is the creator's spouse, that is, the divine mother. As such the moon has roughly the same stature as the sun, Yet, in many ways she was subordinate (e.g., she receives her light from the sun; her synodical orbit depends upon the sun, etc). The moon, as wife, was indeed helpful to the male sun in the creation—the world came about through these two great heavenly bodies. In this sense, Babylonian cosmogony is somewhat analogous to human procreation.<sup>28</sup>

The two inner planets, Mercury and Venus, faithfully accompany the sun not only on his daily course through the sky but also on his annual journey. Yet, as free-standing heavenly bodies, they have their own motions. [25] Like the moon, Mercury and Venus borrow their light from the sun which, due to its greater mass, is at the center of their orbits. These two planets are hidden for long periods in the immense light of the nearby sun. Thus they form—together with the sun—a luminous astral unity. Only occasionally do they emerge from concealment to appear as free-standing heavenly bodies. At those times the solar unity has become a solar trinity.

Unlike the moon, the sun-god is neither ever-changing nor subject to phases. Rather, he reveals himself as one or as three—in simple or tripartite form—depending on whether his satellites are visible or not. Those satellites appear to emerge from the sun and to return to him. They accompany the sun, never straying far away. Thus, they are special 'children' of god. Even as the four largest moons of Jupiter—known to the ancients—were called the "four hounds of Marduk," so the two faithful companions of the sun, Mercury and Venus, were his offspring. But they were even more. Because these heavenly bodies appear to emerge from the sun, it was supposed that they did so also at the beginning of time. In other words, they were solar 'emanations,' born of their father—even as the modern scientists who follow Laplace aver. [26] In certain places the cuneiform texts reveal that Nirgal, Marduk, and Ninib (that is, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) were originally sun gods. We are faced with the proposition that all the gods "were once in Marduk, the god of light"—that is, they were in the sun. We may rephrase this conception:

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<sup>28</sup> Compare the male and female Dyas [= Zeus, Dyaus] at the beginning of the creation account. *Apsu* is the engendering father, *Tiamat* the bearing mother. Cf. *Lahmu* and *Lahamu*, *Ansar* and *Kisar*. (*Enuma Eliš* tablets I–IV. Jensen: K/B. VI.1. Pp. 2–31). Furthermore, consider the Babylonian myth of creation according to Berossus: "When Bel [surely the male sun] came, he split his wife in two. Out of one half of her body he made the earth, out of the other half the sky."



In religion only one god exists. From him all originates. When we look up at the heavens, all the planets first came out of the sun.

Religious motives apparently brought about this cosmic view in theology, for the entire astral scheme of Babylonia was a compromise between, on the one hand, an inner, simple concept of the divine and, on the other hand, the obvious complexity of nature and of god's manifestation in it. The heliocentric conception of Copernicus, with the earth as merely one more planet revolving about the sun, would surely have been received with joy by the ancient Babylonian priests.

This astronomical conception had further ramifications in solar religion. Anyone could see that god was never alone in the sky but was always accompanied by two servant beings. Though these often formed a mysterious unity with the sun, at certain times they presented themselves in the heavens as independent deities. [27] Since these 'children' were two in number, it was only natural that they would be conceived as son and daughter. Mercury, god's son, appears only very rarely to man and generally keeps himself hidden in the father. As a result, in Babylonian theology Mercury has no independent divine characteristics. He is called *Nabi'u*, "Prophet" or "Revealer"—namely, of the will of the father. As revealer, Mercury is the scribe (*tupšarru*) who writes upon the tablets of destiny.<sup>29</sup> Congruent with his astral position as Son of God, Mercury was unmarried and usually conceived of as a young man.

A similar situation obtains with the Daughter of God, Venus, who also lacks independent characteristics. Like her brother Mercury, she is called "Revealer," *Dilbat*. However, there is one great difference between sister and brother. Venus has a much more pronounced astral appearance in the sky—where Mercury is retiring, almost hidden, Venus is brilliant.<sup>30</sup> This is also apparent in religio-historical development. Where the sister takes the foreground, the brother is, as it were, entirely eclipsed by her.

In sum, a simple conception became fourfold as regards the external manifestation of the divine. The belief in one god ensured that the schema had unity. In fact, such a belief cannot admit dual sources of existence—in the form of dual creator planets or dual creator gods. [28] Unlike other peoples, the Babylonians were not content that the moon simply be female and bring forth the world in cooperation with the male sun, in a sort of theogony or cosmogony. In other words, it was not possible that the moon, as a female deity, merely assume a subordinate or withdrawn position. In the last analysis, the moon needed to have its source also in the sun, needed to have once been within the body of the sun. It was necessary that the mother of god's sons also be god's own daughter. We can measure the strength of this conception by observing the energy and consistency with which it was carried through. It must have been very strong, for already at a very early stage in semitic religion the divine mother has fully fused with divine daughter, and the virgin daughter has become mother.

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<sup>29</sup> Compare the Egyptian divine scribe, Thoth (the Greek Hermes), "god of the moon and messages and writing" (B. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 1992:xiii). Thoth was often identified with the heart—which, according to the ancient Egyptians, is the seat of intelligence. Thoth was also related to the *logos* of Plato and to the 'mind' of god (E. Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 1904, vol. I:407). Manetho considered Thoth to be "the first Hermes" (Copenhaver, *op.cit.*, xv). The Romans, in turn, identified Hermes with Mercury.—RS

<sup>30</sup> Venus is the brilliant Morning Star, and the equally brilliant Evening Star. Venus is the only planet bright enough to cast a noticeable shadow on the earth.—RS

Accordingly, in the Babylonian creation account, the sun god brings forth the moon.<sup>31</sup> In solar religions, whenever the moon is female she is always simultaneously daughter and wife of god.

In selenocentric religions, on the other hand, sun and moon exchange roles—the sun is female, daughter of the male lunar deity. Impregnated by the moon, the sun then becomes the mother of god's children. In the South Arabian lunar religion the sun, surprisingly, represents the only female deity. [29] The dual roles of mother and daughter are merged, localized as a mysterious godhead within the female sun. The historical unification of both deities brings with it an astral displacement. The place vacated by the female Venus is opened up for one deity. Into this 'free place,' as it were, the minaeans and sabaean placed the 'Son of God.' For them, Venus is now the brilliant male, 'Athtar (elsewhere Venus is female). No room was left for Mercury—the original, 'hidden' Son of God—who disappears from the pantheon.

[29] Thus, the Son of God is sometimes Mercury, sometimes Venus. As Mercury, god's Son rarely shows himself openly. Mercury is hidden in the Father and forms an astral unity with him. As 'Venus,' however, the Son of God shines with great brilliance in the sky, and shows himself especially as the evening star at twilight. In these cases, the female also shines splendidly in the dual role of divine daughter and lifegiving Mother—the sun herself.

In South Arabia, the Sun (*Šams*) was both mother and daughter, while in Babylon Venus (*Ištar*) was mother and daughter—and, practically speaking, the only female divinity. Though one might speculate that Venus was originally a virgin, she is nevertheless the goddess of sexual love and of fertility—wife and 'mother,' *ummu*. [30] She is 'the merciful mother of mankind,' 'the creator of humans,' the creator of gods,' and especially the mother of the Son of God—shown in numerous Ishtar depictions as the goddess suckling a child at her breast. The name she most often bears is *Belit-ile*. This shows, as Zimmern writes, that her role as mother-goddess was borrowed from *Belit*, the spouse of Bel of Nippur.<sup>32</sup>

The spouse of the Babylonian *Bel* is the female moon. In moon religions there is a reversal: the moon god (*Ea*) is male, and his spouse is to be found in the (female) sun. In Babylon the "mother goddess" (*Ishtar*) was localized in the planet Venus. So, the daughter Venus becomes mother. In South Arabia, however, the mother sun became also daughter.<sup>33</sup> In Babylon as elsewhere the moon was certainly originally venerated as the divine mother, and Venus as the divine daughter. According to South Arabian analogies both goddesses were combined into one planet, represented as the "bride" Venus.

In Babylon, as the concept of mother goddess emancipated itself from the moon and became localized in Venus. In a parallel development Mercury became excluded from the official trinity of sun, moon, and Venus. [31] The moon took Mercury's place as the manifestation of the 'son of god' under the name Sin, a masculine divinity who becomes identified with the son of Bel. This otherwise quite incomprehensible fact is analogous to

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<sup>31</sup> *Enuma Eliš*, tablet 5:12–18.

<sup>32</sup> Damkina, the spouse of Ea, is another Babylonian mother-goddesses patterned after *Belit-ile*.

<sup>33</sup> Hommel sees in *Aja* [*Ai*] the female lunar "bride" of the sun-god *Shamash*. Jensen identifies *Aja* with Venus. Both may be correct.

the South Arabian veneration of the son [*Athtar*] in what was originally a female heavenly body [Venus].

#### *Hidden for three days*

In Babylonia, the son of god in the guise of the moon is hidden for three days each month. [Those are the three days before each new moon. During that dark and particularly sacred time, the son of god was considered ‘home,'] hidden within his solar father’s dwelling. At other times, he [the moon] is ever visible in the sky—that is, when the father [the sun] is absent, namely, at night.

It is clear that the lunar ‘son’ stood in the greatest esteem in Babylon, so much so that he reached almost equal rank with the father. This is evident from Babylonian personal names. Certainly, the moon had a much greater presence in religious feeling than did Mercury, just as the moon far exceeds Mercury in relative size, brilliance, and splendor.

This peculiar trajectory of religious thought leads us to the conclusion that the two originally subordinate and marginal ‘children’ of god eventually won the upper hand. The notion of god as father of mankind and of the entire creation was pushed into the background. The motivating impulse for this trajectory was apparently the very notion of god as ‘father.’ The virgin became mother (*Shamash* or *Ishtar*). She gave birth to a male child (*Athtar* or *Sin*) who was to become an imposing divinity of equal importance with the father, the moon, and the sun.

Whether one agrees with Hommel that the moon-religion originated in Arabia, or with Zimmern that it was originally indigenous to Babylonia, the fact is that this religion was widespread in Babylonia from the earliest times. [32] It was first concentrated in the cult center of Ur on the west bank of the Euphrates, where the moon was the father, Venus and Mercury were daughter and son respectively. The moon religion was also anciently found in Harran in Northern Mesopotamia.<sup>34</sup>

In Babylonian theology, on the other hand, we encounter two systems, one which may be characterized as lunar, the other as solar. In both the sun has a distinguished place. In the Babylonian lunar schema, the moon *Sin* is father, the sun *Shamash* is the son of god, and Venus (*Ishtar*) is daughter. In the Babylonian solar religion, on the other hand, the sun *Shamash* is father, the moon is daughter, and Mercury (*Nabu*) is son of god. The sun-religion had its main centers east of the Euphrates.

#### *The victorious sun*

[32] Furthermore, the sun religion comes strongly to the fore only later, with the Hammurabi dynasty of Babylon—at least as can be determined from the official state religions of history.<sup>35</sup> Earlier, Mesopotamian religion was lunar. If we may label the moon-religion ‘arabian,’ then we may point to the arabian origin of Babylonian religion,

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<sup>34</sup> Note that in the moon religion of Ur and Harran, the sun is not distinguished at all. This would cause enduring conflict with the dominant solar religion of Babylonia, that of Marduk. This conflict came to a head in the sixth century, during the reign of Nabonidus, king of Babylon yet champion of the moon god.  
—RS

<sup>35</sup> Principally on linguistic grounds, it has been suggested that Hammurabi’s origin was West Semitic or Arab.

for arabian religion clearly was lunar. This, however, was eventually overshadowed by the Babylonian sun religion.<sup>36</sup>

Babylonian religion was originally lunar, with the moon as father and the sun as his male offspring. That offspring—in the outer manifestation of the solar orb—must have played an inordinately important role, particularly on Babylonian soil, for the sun (assimilated to Marduk) displaces the moon god Ea and is subsequently worshipped to the most extravagant degree.<sup>37</sup>

Marduk took over all of Mercury's functions. These included the status of son of god, revealer, prophet, advocate, and mediator for mankind to the divine. The sun was the creator, Shamash. As the new *de facto* solar Babylonian divinity, Marduk receives appellatives such as "World creator," "King of heaven and earth," "King of kings," and so on.<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact that, technically, he is only the son of god, Marduk plays a role greater even than that of the father himself. In short, he is the actual 'god.'<sup>39</sup>

## THE MOON RELIGIONS

### *The son of god*<sup>40</sup>

In the Levantine areas long preceding Christianity, the principal deity eventually became not the father but the son. The emphatic veneration of the first-born male ("son-worship") can be satisfactorily explained only through new relationships. After all, the son of god—regardless by what epithets he is known—can never officially become the lord of his own divine 'home'—that distinction belongs to the father. Yet Marduk was lord in practice. This reveals a strong henotheistic tendency found throughout Semitic astral religion. That tendency is the germinating agent which produced the old personal names and which apparently lies at the heart of all stellar religion. For, although the astral system led formally to a trinity of gods, in practical life 'god' was venerated either

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<sup>36</sup> Thus, the religion of Mesopotamia in the third millennium BCE was lunar, inspired by arabian prototypes. According to the author, the religion of Sumer and of Akkad (Sargon) was lunar. A solar revolution in the time of Hammurabi led to the dominance of the sun god Marduk. The great conflict down through the ages in Mesopotamia—and perhaps throughout the Levant—was henceforth between the old lunar and the new solar religions, between west and east.—RS

<sup>37</sup> Thus the son defeats the father, a universal battle known since primordial times.—RS

<sup>38</sup> All these epithets are later assimilated to the Christian "Jesus"—the "Son of God," "World creator," "King of heaven and earth," and "King of kings." Like Marduk, Jesus is fundamentally a solar sky god.

<sup>39</sup> So also in the Christian religion, Jesus overshadows the father. Marduk's name, AMAR.UTU, means "Son of the Sun," but this only reflects the solar preference of post-Hammurabi Babylonia. There was also the tradition—a holdover from the prior lunar religion—that Marduk was in fact the son of the moon-god (father) Ea. In either case—as son of the sun or son of the moon—Marduk was son of the father, that is, the Son of God.—RS

<sup>40</sup> Special care must be exercised in the following paragraphs to differentiate the homonyms "son" and "sun." The numerous roles and names assigned to various divinities need not detain the reader. The principles, as we have seen in the prior section, were few and familial: father, mother, son, daughter, and uncle. To these were added the empirical observations of sky and planets, especially the principle of light (day) and darkness (night), brilliance (sun, moon, Venus) and hiddenness (Mercury).—RS

as father, maiden mother,<sup>41</sup> or son. For example, Ur venerated the father *Abu* (in the form of the moon, also called *Ea* or *Sin*); the Minaeans venerated the lunar father under the name *Wadd*; Uruk, Akkad, Niniveh and Arbela venerated the maiden mother *Ishtar* (Venus); Borsippa venerated the son *Nabu* (Mercury);<sup>42</sup> Babylon the son *Marduk* (firstborn of the sun); and Hadramaut the son *Sin* (the moon, son of the male *Athtar*).

### *Hadramaut*

[34] The inscriptions from Hadramaut are, unfortunately, small in number and badly mutilated. In the largest and most legible thus far to come down to us (Os. 29), the principal god of Hadramaut is venerated under the name *Sin*. He is male (*dhū*) and the son of '*Athtar* (*Sin dhu ilm wa 'Athtar Abūsu*, line 5), "Sin of God and his father '*Athtar*." The names *Sin* and '*Athtar* can only refer to the moon and Venus (analogous to the Babylonian *Sin* and *Ishtar*). We have here an interesting parallel to the son-worship prevalent in the Hammurabi dynasty, for on Babylonian soil the sun must have played the principal role (as in Arabia the moon). This is manifestly evident from the inscriptions. When the principal role was no longer the father, as of yore, but now the son, we see that new conditions obtained or unique religious motives. In other words, the son now corresponded more closely to the religious understanding of mankind than the father. That indeed some special theological motive is in play, may be seen from the fact that the father figure is pushed so far into the background that he becomes attached to Venus—a quite impossible development in the ordinary course of affairs. Originally, the father of all and of mankind was either the sun or the moon.

[35] In Hadramaut the son of god was elevated to principal deity, with the moon as his heavenly body. He is a personal, ethical god. *Sin* is a protecting deity, as we see from the commemoration *ṣidqi-dhakara*, "My Righteousness remembers." God is personal (he remembers), and he is ethical. Outwardly he is the moon, genealogically he is the son, but in his innermost being he is righteousness itself, which name he bears. Therefore, man is able to entrust all that he has into the care of this merciful god (*ṣidqi-dhakara*), "his soul, his relations, his children, his property, the gleam of his eye and the thought of his heart" (Os. 29, ll. 6–7).

### *Qataban*

On his fourth South Arabian voyage 1892–94, Dr. Glaser collected several hundred new Minaean and Sabaeen inscriptions and sent them back to Europe. He also found about one hundred Qatabanian inscriptions—the only ones known up to the present. Unfortunately, no museum, academy, or other institution of learning has received these, and so this valuable material has, for the last decade, remained in Dr. Glaser's private possession, inaccessible to the public and to academe—a severe blow to the study of South Arabian religion. After a private correspondence with Dr. Glaser, Hommel was able in 1895 to affirm the most salient facts. The name of the principal Qatabanian deity is '*Amm*. In 1900 Hommel verified that '*Amm* is a moon god, its name functioning as an equivalent for 'god' in Qatabanian personal names and constituting the characteristic

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<sup>41</sup> "Maiden mother" (*jungfräuliche Mutter*) is, of course, an oxymoron.—RS

<sup>42</sup> It can be no coincidence that Borsippa was the location of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9). In Borsippa, *Nabu* (Mercury) takes precedence. Mercury represented 'hidden wisdom,' i.e. gnosis. To the Genesis author, Borsippa was the home of arrogant gnostics, those who arrogated to man things which 'properly' belong only to god, including the knowledge of good and evil.—RS

element. [36] Other Qatabanian divinities are Venus (*'Athtar*), Mercury (*Anbai*), and the sun (*Šams*).

Some Qatabanian inscriptions came to my work desk in 1902 for editing and publication, thanks to Dr. Glaser's friendly auspices. Five of these show the fourfold conception of divinity. Some inscriptions, however, ignore Mercury and present only the trinity of Venus, moon, and sun (*'Athtar*, *'Amm*, and *Šams*). So we have certainly here a reduction of the four heavenly bodies (father, son, mother, daughter) to three (father, son, mother-daughter).

Though the god *'Amm* was a lunar deity, he has no astral name (as is customary with Babylonian divinities)—his is a personal name-of-relation, “uncle.”<sup>43</sup> It is a name of endearment which expresses his close relationship to mankind.<sup>44</sup> How intimate this characterization is becomes evident from the many personal names associated with *'Amm*, names demonstrating that he is a good and friendly “Uncle,” particularly to mankind—e.g. “My uncle” (*'Ammī*). He is a personal divinity (*jada'a*) and judge (*šaduqa*, *amara*). [37] Above all, however, he is a loving and beneficent god (*anisa*, *kariba*, *sami'a*).

#### *Minaean religion, love, and the 'word'*

In the minaeen inscriptions we have the stereotypical list of Venus (male), the moon (male), and the sun (female): *'Athtar*, *Wadd*, and *Šams*.<sup>45</sup> The latter represents the only female deity in this trinity, at once mother and daughter. *Wadd* is the moon, *Wadd<sup>m</sup> šahrān*, and as such the god of both state and people. As in other South Arabian nations he and *'Athtar* (Venus) are both male. Which of these two deities, however, was the “father”? The answer is readily seen in the stereotypic formula *Wadd<sup>m</sup> Ab<sup>m</sup>*, “Wadd (“love”) is father.” The natural and original conception of the world and of the divine in the selenocentric Arabian moon religions was that the moon was father of all. A religious hymn in the cylinder seal literature shows that this all-father concept was dominant already in the 3rd millennium BCE, as was also the moon-religion. In contrast, veneration of the son dates back only to the 2nd millennium.

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<sup>43</sup> The Hebrew word for “uncle, beloved, love” is *dwd* (or *dod*, dalet-haw-dalet, BDB p. 187)—the same spelling as “David.” This has led at least one scholar (Sayce) to propose that the “city of David” (*bit dwd*) is better translated “city of [the god] Dod” (references at BDB:188). The words *bit dwd* also occur in the recently-discovered Tel Dan inscription, and their correct interpretation has occasioned a great deal of controversy. We simply note that a god by the name “uncle, love” is well attested in pre-Israelite religion in the Middle East, e.g. the Qatabanian *'Amm* and the Minaean *Wadd* (see below). The latter is the equivalent to Hebrew *dwd*. *Dād* and its female form, *Dādat*, were North Arabian terms for deities (Haussig 432), while the Mesha Inscription (IX BCE) mentions an *'r'l dwdh* (“altar of dodah”?) in Ataroth. All this corrects misinformation that continues to be vociferously propounded, e.g., “As for *dwd*, which some scholars have related to some deity, no such deity has been documented” (H. Hagelia, *The Dan Debate*, 2009:132). Nor should we leave out of consideration the name of the great North Semitic sky god, *Ha-dad* (Old Akkadian, *a-dad*).—RS

<sup>44</sup> In the [Qatabanian] system *'Amm* (“Uncle”) certainly stands in the place of the father. A female deity, apparently the female sun, carries the name *Athirat* in Qatabanian texts and is assimilated to the male moon, *Wadd*. She seems identical to the Westsemitic *Ashratu* who, like the Babylonian *Ishtar* is characterized as bride, *Kallatu*, “the bride of the king of heaven, who enters in majesty, the queen of feminine grace and fullness.”

<sup>45</sup> The presence of *Šams* in Minaean inscriptions is questionable. Names for the sun-goddess are place-specific (“Goddess of Našk, “of Hmy,” etc. See Haussig 531).—RS

In the so-called *Hymn to the Moon* from Ur,<sup>46</sup> [38] the father “creates the light of the world.” He reveals himself in the hearts of men as “father, compassionate, merciful, he who holds the life of the whole land in his hand.” He is the “father who nourishes all, who looks out for all life and who establishes the laws.” Obviously, these things cannot be said of a heavenly body, but only of an ethical world ruler. Though the moon does not speak, the ‘word’ of this father was held in especially esteem. Its utterances are the above-mentioned “laws”—“Your word allows truth and rightness to stand.” That is, the laws of god are fundamentally ethical, not juristic.

The sun appears as the moon’s spouse in this hymn, and one may perhaps detect a spiritualization of the ‘son’ concept in the oft-mentioned ‘word’ of god, through whose mediation the creation came about.<sup>47</sup> Despite these elements, the moon as ‘father’ is the first and only source of existence. He is “nourisher of gods and men,” “creator of the world,” the one through whose word vegetation grows, and so on. Since he is creator of all, the sun (which is female in Arabian religions) must also be his creation—that is, his daughter. To carry this to its logical conclusion, the moon is therefore not only “father, who nourishes all,” but also “maternal body which births all.” The moon is both father and mother, the androgynous basic principle underlying existence. As such, the moon is created “out of itself.”

*Wadd, the compassionate father.* The innermost nature of this Minaean national god, outwardly represented in the heavenly form of the moon and genealogically as the father, is captured in the name *Wadd*. This name is neither astral nor relational. [39] It is a moral construct with the meaning “ethical love” (in contradistinction to sexual love).<sup>48</sup> We already find this characteristic of god in the common fund of old Semitic personal names.<sup>49</sup>

When ‘ethical, holy love’ is the god adored by an entire nation, then we have passed far beyond what can be described through simple astral relationships. In fact, we have put our finger on the religious pulse of a people, one which chooses to emphatically link itself with a compassionate, personal god. This conception of divinity was not in name [*offizielle*] only, but is confirmed by the conception of ‘father’ known generally among the people. We see it, for example, in the formula *Wadd<sup>m</sup> Ab<sup>m</sup>* or *Ab<sup>m</sup> Wadd<sup>m</sup>*, “Love is the father” or “The father is love.” We encounter this formula in structural inscriptions. That is, a newly-built dwelling was often dedicated to god with those holy words, and thus placed under his protection. Furthermore, Glaser found the same formula on various wood, brass, and stone tablets which—evident from the hole at one end—were apparently meant to be hung around the neck and worn as a sort of protective amulet. Thus the fundamental principle in religion was brought closer to the individual and always accompanied him, that he might remember the compassionate god who is at once father and love.

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<sup>46</sup> IV., R. 9. Hommel, *Gestirndienst.*, pp. 23-26.

<sup>47</sup> That is, the ‘word’ functioned originally as the ‘son,’ and through that Word the world was created (cf. GJn 1:3).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. ‘enkratism’—the rejection for sacred purposes of marriage and/or conjugal relations, of meat or of wine.

<sup>49</sup> In the predicative form *waddad-ilu*. It is also found in the old Arabic as a substantive, *Sa’ada Wadd*, the national god.

*The evil spirit.* The inscriptions emphatically attest to the high veneration the South Arabian peoples had for the god of love.<sup>50</sup> [40] Interestingly, we also find among these peoples an unethical, evil deity, *Nkrh̄*—analogous to the Babylonian *Makrū* or *Nakaru*, “the adversary.”<sup>51</sup> In Babylon, the contrasting ethical/unethical principles were split into two deities. If this conjecture holds, we must look to a divinity outside the customary trinity also among the Minaeans—namely, to a fourth god who is male, unethical, and plainly evil.

### *Sabaeen religion*

It appears that the trinity was also venerated in the latest South Arabian kingdom to develop, the Sabaeen. *Haubas* and *Almāquhu* were two names for the male moon, while ‘*Athtar*’ was the male Venus and *Šams* the female sun. The inscriptions from the Temple of the Moon (described by Glaser) and from elsewhere show that the moon was the principal and official state god. His two names are astral. Hommel thinks that *Almāquhu* means “His Lord,” and that (by analogy) it is an abbreviation for the fuller form, “The Moon and His Lord,” *Haubas wa almāqu-hū*.

Fresnel supposes that *Haubas* means “Dryer” (“The one who dries”). The moon is that agent which makes the tide recede—it “dries” out the shore. Of the two movements of the tide—incoming and outgoing—the last gave its name to the moon. This, argues Fresnel, is because the rise of the water is ‘natural’ motion, the ebb ‘unnatural,’ effected only through divine power. [41] The remarkable aspect in this is that the moon draws the water to itself for over six hours daily, leaving the coastline dry and passable on foot or by animal. Then, scarcely a moment later, the waves are crashing there as before. The effect is greatest in equatorial regions where the tides are strongest. This particularly obtains on the flat stretches of coastline around the Red Sea, which must have created an impression. The Babylonian equivalent to the moon’s effect on the sea is possibly the title of the moon god *Ea*, “Lord of the Deep Water” (*šar apsī*). *Ea* was particularly venerated in Eridu, a settlement on the seashore and at the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

[42] According to one Sabaeen inscription the female divinity is birth- and mother-goddess, similar to the Babylonian *Ishtar*. She is particularly the goddess of fertility.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, like *Ishtar*, she is the mother of the son of god, for her name, *Umm’athtar*, means “Mother of ‘*Athtar*.”<sup>53</sup>

We see from the hadramautic regional phrase *Ab<sup>m</sup> ‘Athtar* that the father is ‘*Athtar*. The moon would then be the son.<sup>54</sup> In lists of South Arabian divinities ‘*Athtar* is regularly placed first, the moon in middle position, and the sun last. This circumstance might

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<sup>50</sup> *Wadd* was a very popular deity throughout South Arabia. In Saba (Sheba) he had several names indicating his function as ‘patron.’ *Wadd*’s sacred animal was the serpent, the primordial symbol of wisdom (Haussig:549; Salm 2011:31ff.).—RS

<sup>51</sup> Hebrew, “satan.”

<sup>52</sup> J. and H. Derenbourg, “Études sur ‘Épigraphie du Jémen” (extract from *Journale Asiatique*). Paris 1884, no. 11. (A translation of the inscription is given at Nielsen 42.—RS)

<sup>53</sup> In the religious genealogy of the Sabaeans, then, everything centers about the son of god (Venus). The moon *Haubas* is not primarily a husband, nor a creator-god, but “father” (of the son). Likewise, *Umm’athtar* (the sun) is not primarily the wife of the moon but “mother” of the son of god, ‘*Athtar*.—RS

<sup>54</sup> Hal. 184.4; OS. 29.



indicate that, at least in the official state religion, Venus, moon, and sun were accordingly thought of as father, son, and mother (daughter). In 1888 Glaser copied the entry inscription on the large sabaeen causeway (Gl. 618) in the ruins of Marib, the ancient capital city. In his edition, the following sabaeen trinity appears instead of astral determinatives: *rahmān-an wa-masīh-hu was-rūh [qa]dis*, “The compassionate, and his ,messiah [anointed], and the holy spirit.” The divine designation *rahmān*, “compassionate,” at the beginning parallels the ethical abstraction we encountered in the minaeen *Wadd*, “love,” a name for the father (*wadd<sup>m</sup> ab<sup>m</sup>*). [43] Later, this is the customary designation for god in the Koran. *Rūh qadis* at the end is also an ethical abstraction. In contrast, the word *masīh*, “anointed,” must refer to a human being (king, priest, or prophet), the anointed of god. This ‘messiah’ is apparently the ‘only-begotten’ (Gk. *monogenēs*) son who, according to Damascius was begotten from the divine father and divine mother.

In the above ways, the divine revealed itself in various external forms, as ‘persons’ belonging to the human family. A single divine persona is pre-eminent, that of the ‘father.’ In the Old Arabian personal names with ‘my father’ that are listed below, we recognize that this form of address reflects, in a remarkable way, the deepest religious thought to be found on West Semitic soil—the unity of man and god. First, we have the human element—the divine expresses himself/herself as father, mother, or son, terms which define human existence and development. Secondly, the heavenly bodies emanate one from another to reach humanity. So, god is close to man. The relations obtaining between the persons of the trinity also obtain among men, who thus approach divinity in turn.

<i>Ab(ī)-kariba</i>	(My) father has blessed
<i>Ab(ī)-ali</i>	(My) father is exalted
<i>Ab(ī)-amara</i>	(My) father has commanded
<i>Ab(ī)-dhamara</i>	(My) father has preserved
<i>Ab(ī)-jathu’a</i>	(My) father helps

For the Babylonians, god was pre-eminently father of the world. For the Arabians, on the other hand, he was pre-eminently father of the individual. [44] The latter conception of ‘father’ is in no wise an astronomical idea—is it a religious one.

A second group of Arabian personal names emphasizes the female aspect of the divine schema, in that the son of god is referred to as the ‘mother’s brother’:

<i>Hāl(ī)-amara</i>	(My) mother’s brother has commanded
<i>Hāl(ī)-jada’a</i>	(My) mother’s brother knows
<i>Hāl(ī)-kariba</i>	(My) mother’s brother has blessed
<i>Hāl(ī)-japi’a</i>	(My) mother’s brother shines
<i>Hāl(ī)-wakula</i>	(My) mother’s brother rules

If the son of god is the mother’s brother, then the mother must simultaneously be the sister of the son—in other words, she is also the daughter of god. In the above personal names the mysterious conception of the feminine divinity as both daughter of god and mother of son is clearly implied.

Another group of names reflects the special veneration of the divine son, who is simply called “brother”:

<i>Aḥ(ī)-kariba</i>	(My) brother has blessed	(South Arabian)
<i>Aḥum-kīnum</i>	The brother is faithful	(Babylonian)
<i>Aḥī-milkī</i>	(My) brother is my king	(Assyrian)
<i>Aḥī-rāmu</i>	(My) brother is exalted	(Aramaic)
<i>[A]ḥī-ram</i>	(My) brother is exalted	(Phoenician)
<i>Aḥī-ṭābu</i>	(My) brother is good	(Canaanite)
<i>Aḥī-‘ezer</i>	(My) brother is the help	(Hebrew)

Because god is parent of humankind, each person is a child of god. In turn, because the person is himself or herself a child of god (*mar ilu-šū*), the divine son is one's own brother. In this conception god is not an exalted figure sitting upon a distant throne. He stands closer even than one's own brother. He is not merely creator and father of mankind, but is himself 'born' like men.

The unity between man and god, however, is not complete, for god has not become fully human. He has shown himself born as a 'son' from divine father and divine mother, yet that son is heavenly, not earthly or human.

[45] The planet Mercury was originally the divine manifestation of the son of god, for Mercury is the heavenly body which stands closest to the sun and represents the first divine emanation, that is, the first-born of the creation. The first-born, however, is distant from earth and man. This apparent detachment means that god only rarely appears to man in the form of the planet Mercury. It also tempers the thesis that the physical manifestation of the divine son increased with time in the various religions of the Levant. At least in the official state religions, as noted above, though his form was indeed manifested through important heavenly bodies, the personal names show that the concept 'son of god' was internalized and emancipated from its external astral manifestation. This was so that the unity between god and man could truly come about, and god could indeed become 'son of man.'

The personal names reflect three principal deities. Those names in which the divine son assumes an inner relationship with man—those in particular represent the special and characteristic element at the heart of the old Hebrew, Aramaic, South Arabian, and West Semitic-Babylonian nomenclature. The inscriptional record extensively demonstrates this already by 2,000 BCE.

The inscriptions and personal names show that the divine typically manifested himself/herself in the old Arabian moon religion as personal, ethical, and three-fold—while the unity of the godhead mysteriously survives. Accordingly, we find god manifested externally through three heavenly bodies, though in Arabia the moon deity preponderates. The three heavenly bodies are together only once a month—at the time of the new moon.<sup>55</sup> Thus we are basically dealing with a new moon religion. [46] The seventy-two hours when the moon has disappeared within the sun, and when it and the sun together form a mysterious unity with Venus—that time must be accounted the most important in the cult.

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<sup>55</sup> At times during the three days between the old and new moons, the moon, Venus, and Mercury are all hidden from man's gaze, apparently together 'within' the sun. During those three nights all the major heavenly bodies depart from the *manifest* cosmos. The ancients did not suppose, however, that the gods simply abandoned man. The opposite is rather the case—at that special time divinity is uniquely present to man *immaterially*. In other words, a 'new moon religion' is one which stresses the immateriality of existence and the essential hiddenness of truth.—RS

[46] Revealed internally, the divine is ethical, personal, and manifested three-fold as father, son, and mother-daughter. While in theory all three go back to the father, in practice the veneration of the son takes on ever-increasing importance, together with a gradual interiorization of the concept of divinity, from which spring the astral manifestations.

### *The Harranian "Sabians"*

Our present evidence, which has considerable gaps (yet is fuller for Arabia), teaches us that the religion of the moon was widespread through great stretches of Arabia and Syria. This is evident in the general diffusion of personal names. The empirical evidence shows that the moon religion had its longest existence in the northern Mesopotamian city of Harran, though it was there adorned with foreign elements. In Roman times the imposing Harranian moon-temple and the ancient mysteries associated with the moon festival aroused astonishment. Roman authors report that Caracalla was murdered in the vicinity of the temple when he attempted to witness a moon festival. The Harranians clung to their old religion with stubborn tenacity, despite repeated missionary campaigns by Christians and then by Muslims. Their tenacity continued until finally, in 830 CE, the Koran sanctioned the "Sabians" as a sect whose religious practice would henceforth be tolerated.<sup>56</sup>

In Christian times the old Harranian conception of divinity appears strongly mixed with neoplatonic elements and is subordinated in a mass of religio-philosophical works by Jews, Christians, Moslems, and even by Harranians themselves. [47] Nevertheless, the Harranian religious traditions, as portrayed by the moslem scholars Al-Nadim (d. 995 CE)<sup>57</sup> and Al-Dimashqi (d. 1327 CE), echo the ancient and original conception. "The Sabians of Harran and its neighborhood were Syrian heathen, the remains of ancient heathen in the land" writes Chwolsohn in his exhaustive study of the post-Christian form of this religion.<sup>58</sup>

### *Phoenicia*

As regards pre-Christian material remains, Phoenician inscriptions rarely enter into a discussion of the West Semitic sources. This may be because Palestine was a part of the Babylonian sphere of influence as early as 2,000 BCE, as the Tell el-Amarna tablets show.<sup>59</sup> In any case, Babylonian religion has been particularly influential, Hittite religion

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<sup>56</sup> The identification of Harranian moon-worshippers with "Sabians" is significant. Chwolsohn has shown that the Sabians of the common era are none other than followers of John the Baptist, i.e., Mandeans (I: 182).—RS

<sup>57</sup> "According to En-Nedim [Ibn al-Nadim], the Harranians, or "Sabians," observed a thirty days' fast in honour of the moon, commencing on the eighth day after the new moon of Adsar (March); a nine days' fast in honour of "the Lord of Good Luck" (probably Jupiter), commencing on the ninth day before the new moon of the first Kanun (December); and a seven days' fast in honour of the sun, commencing on the eighth or ninth day after the new moon of Shobath (February). The thirty days' fast seems to have implied abstinence from every kind of food and drink between sunrise and sunset, whereas the seven days' fast is expressly said to have consisted in abstinence from fat and wine." E. Westermarck, "The Principles of Fasting," in *Folklore* 18 (Dec. 1907): 414-15.

<sup>58</sup> Chwolsohn I:180.

<sup>59</sup> We now know that the Amarna correspondence dates to the fourteenth century BCE. This does not affect the author's thesis.—RS

much less so—because, unfortunately, Hittite has yet to be deciphered.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, two Old Aramaic inscriptions, the so-called Nerab inscriptions, apparently date to the first half of the first millennium BCE.<sup>61</sup> These show that the western Syrians also venerated god as the moon (cf. *kamar šahar*, “priest of the moon”). Here, as in Arabia, the conception of divinity is threefold or fourfold: *Šahar* is the male moon, *Šamš* the female sun, *Nušk* (Babyl. *Nušku*) the son of god, and Nikkal (Babyl. Ninkal) probably the spouse of the moongod. Also, in the large inscription from Teima in northern Arabia (apparently dating to the fifth century BCE) a trinity of divinities is involved.

[48] Our principal sources for the study of the moon god, then, remain the South Arabian inscriptions and the cuneiform literature, in so far as the latter impinge upon religio-historical questions. In this chapter we have gained the important recognition that the Arabian conception of the divine was multi-faceted, mysterious, and expressed externally primarily in lunar terms. Indeed, we are dealing chiefly with a ‘new moon’ religion. This unique conception widely controlled cultic expressions over great periods of time and over great distances.

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<sup>60</sup> Hittite was deciphered by B. Hrozný. He wrote the first grammar of the language in 1917.—RS

<sup>61</sup> These two funerary inscriptions (now at the Louvre) were discovered in 1891 at Nerab, a small town in Syria SE of Aleppo. The *editio princeps* was by C. Clermont-Ganneau in 1897. Lidzbarski dated them to the 7th century BCE. Cf. *Journal of Semitic Studies* 51 (2006):19–43.—RS

Appendix

The major pre-Israelite pantheons of the Middle East  
(An asterisk indicates the principal deity)

SOUTH ARABIA

Saba

Father:	<i>'Almaqah, Haubas</i>	* (moon)
Goddess:	<i>Shamash</i>	(sun)
Son of god:	<i>'Athtar</i>	(Venus)

Ma'in (Minaean)

Father:	<i>Wadd, Sīn, etc.</i>	* (moon)
Mother/daughter:	<i>Našq, etc.</i>	(sun)
Son of god:	<i>'Athtar</i>	(Venus)

Qataban:

"Friend", "Uncle":	<i>'Amm</i>	* (moon)
Goddess:	<i>Athirat, Shamash</i>	(sun)
Brilliant son of god:	<i>'Athtar</i>	(Venus)
Hidden son of god:	<i>Anbai (cf. Nabu)</i>	(Mercury)

Hadramaut:

Son of god:	<i>Sīn, Hāul</i>	* (moon)
Mother:	<i>Shamash (&amp; other)</i>	(sun)
Father:	<i>'Athtar</i>	(Venus)

BABYLONIA

Lunar pantheon (pre-Hammurabi):

Father:	<i>Ea, Sin</i>	* (moon)
Son of god:	<i>Shamash</i>	(sun)
Daughter of god:	<i>Ishtar</i>	(Venus)

Harran:

Father:	<i>Sin</i>	* (moon)
Mother:	<i>Sarratu</i>	(sun)
Daughter of god:	<i>Ishtar</i>	(Venus)
Son of god:	<i>Nušku</i>	(Mercury)

Solar pantheon (post-Hammurabi):

Father:	<i>Marduk</i>	* (sun)
Mother/daughter:	<i>Ishtar</i>	(Venus)
Son of god:	<i>Nabu</i>	(Mercury)

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