

As one can also think of inclining from a crooked standard to the straight, so حنيف was supposed to be one who turned from the false religions to the true.¹ It is obvious that these suggestions are of little help in our problem.²

The word occurs not infrequently in the poetry of the early years of Islam.³ All these passages are set forth and examined by Horovitz, *KU*, 56 ff., and many of them by Margoliouth, *JRAS*, 1903, p. 480 ff., the result being that it seems generally to mean *Muslim* and in the odd occurrences which may be pre-Islamic to mean *heathen*.⁴ In any case in none of these passages is it associated with Abraham, and there is so much uncertainty as to whether any of them can be considered pre-Islamic that they are of very little help towards settling the meaning of the word for us. It is unfortunate also that we are equally unable to glean any information as to the primitive meaning of the word from the well-known stories of the Ḥanīfs who were earlier contemporaries of Muḥammad, for while we may agree with Lyall, *JRAS*, 1903, p. 744, that these were all actual historical personages, yet the tradition about them that has come down to us has been so obviously worked over in Islamic times, that so far from their stories helping to explain the Qur'ān, the Qur'ān is necessary to explain them.⁵

We are driven back then to an examination of the word itself.

Bell, *Origin*, 58, would take it as a genuine Arabic word from حنف to decline, turn from, and thus agrees with the general orthodox theory.⁶ We have already noted the difficulty of this, however, and as a matter of fact some of the Muslim authorities knew that as used in the Qur'ān it was a foreign word, as we learn from Mas'ūdī's *Tanbīh*,⁷ where it is given as Syriac.

¹ *LA*, x, 403; Rāghib, *Mufradāt*, 133.

² Margoliouth, *JRAS*, 1903, p. 477. "These suggestions are clearly too fanciful to deserve serious consideration."

³ The name 𐩇𐩣𐩪 in Sabaeen and in the Safaite inscriptions (Ryckmans, *Noms propres*, i, 96) as well as the tribal name حنيفة ought perhaps to be taken into account.

⁴ Noldeke, *ZDMG*, xli, 721; de Goeje, *Bibl. Geogr. Arab*, viii, Glossary, p. xviii. Wellhausen, *Reste*, 239, thought that it meant a Christian ascetic, and in this he is followed by Noldeke-Schwally, i, 8, but see Rudolph, *Abhängigkeit*, 70.

⁵ Kuenen, *Hibbert Lectures*, 1882, p. 20. On these Ḥanīfs see especially Caetani, *Annali*, i, 183 ff., and Sprenger, *Leben*, i, 43-7, 67-92, 110-137.

⁶ So apparently Macdonald, *MW*, vi, 308, who takes it to mean *heretic*, and see Schulthess in *Noldeke Festschrift*, p. 86.

⁷ Ed. de Goeje in *BGA*, viii, p. 91—وهذه كلمة سريانية عربت.