

INTRODUCTION

One of the few distinct impressions gleaned from a first perusal of the bewildering confusion of the Qur'ān, is that of the amount of material therein which is borrowed from the great religions that were active in Arabia at the time when the Qur'ān was in process of formation. From the fact that Muḥammad was an Arab, brought up in the midst of Arabian paganism and practising its rites himself until well on into manhood,¹ one would naturally have expected to find that Islam had its roots deep down in this old Arabian paganism. It comes, therefore, as no little surprise, to find how little of the religious life of this Arabian paganism is reflected in the pages of the Qur'ān. The names of a few old deities²; odd details of certain pagan ceremonies connected with rites of sacrifice and pilgrimage³; a few deep-rooted superstitions connected with Jinn, etc., and some fragments of old folk-tales,⁴ form practically all the traces one can discover therein of this ancient religion in the midst of whose devotees Muḥammad was born and bred. It may be true, as Rudolph insists,⁵ that in many passages of the Qur'ān the Islamic varnish only thinly covers a heathen substratum, but even a cursory reading of the book makes it plain that Muḥammad drew his inspiration not from the religious life and experiences of his own land and his own people, but from the great monotheistic religions which were pressing down into Arabia in his day.⁶ Most of the personages who move through the pages of the Qur'ān, viz. Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, Dāwūd, Sulaimān, Nūḥ, 'Isā, are well-known Biblical characters. So also the place-names—Bābil, Rūm, Madyan, Sabā', and many of the commonest religious terms—Shaitān, Tawrah, Injil, Sakīna, Firdaus, Jahannam, are equally familiar to all who know the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. So one is not surprised

¹ Convincing proof of this is found in the statement of the Prophet quoted in Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, iii, 664, to the effect that on a certain occasion he sacrificed a ewe to 'Uzzā, which he excuses on the ground that at that time he was following the religion of his people.

² Sūra, liii, 19, 20; lxxi, 22, 23.

³ ii, 153; xxii, 28-30; v, 1-4; xxii, 37.

⁴ Such as those of 'Ād and Thamūd.

⁵ *Abhängigkeit*, 26, n. 9. His reference here is to Sūras cxiii, cxiv in particular, but the statement is true of many passages elsewhere.

⁶ Nöldeke-Schwally, ii, 121; Buhl, *ET*, ii, 1066; Ahrens, *Muḥammed als Religionsstifter*, 22 ff.