Rain-Giver, Bone-Breaker, Score-Settler

Allāh in Pre-Quranic Poetry

Nicolai Sinai

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In fond memory of Christmas 2018

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Acknowledgements

This essay started as a brief comment on the divine name *allāh* to be included in a commentary on the Quran's opening sura and quickly outgrew its original purpose. The essay was researched and written within the framework of the project *Qur'anic Commentary: An Integrative Paradigm*, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 771047). The essay reflects only the author's views, and the ERC is not responsible for any of the claims expressed in it or for any use that may be made of the information it contains. Apart from the two anonymous reviewers, I am grateful to the following scholars for comments, corrections, and useful suggestions: Peri Bearman, Saqib Hussain, Marianna Klar, James Montgomery, Behnam Sadeghi, Nora K. Schmid, Geert Jan van Gelder, and Holger Zellentin. I am also obliged to Patrick Franke for the opportunity to present parts of this essay in a lecture at the University of Bamberg in July 2019. The colleagues listed should not be held responsible for the flaws that remain.

1. Introduction

The geographical origin of the quranic corpus has been a longstanding bone of scholarly contention. While John Wansbrough's pioneering proposal that the Quran may only have reached closure in the "sectarian milieu" of ninth-century Mesopotamia is hardly a viable hypothesis anymore, scholars like Patricia Crone, Stephen Shoemaker, and Mark Durie have continued to highlight aspects of the Quran or its relationship to earlier traditions that are more easily explained by placing the Quran's genesis further north than posited by Islamic sources.[1] Nonetheless, as I have argued elsewhere, a suitably adapted version of the Quran's traditional scenario of origin, including its customary dating to the beginning of the seventh century, is well equipped to account for most of the relevant evidence, even if some loose ends remain.[2] Aspects of the Quran that chime well with a peninsular context of emergence include, for instance, the quranic references to the performance of animal sacrifices and the names of the deities catalogued in Q 53:19–20 and 71:23, including the trio Allāt, al-ʿUzzā, and Manāt, who were the objects of pagan Arabian cults.[3] Moreover, Peter Webb and Walid Saleh have recently once more reminded us of the pivotal position of Arabian space and lore in the Quran.[4] The subtitle of a dissertation on the Quran that was defended in 2017 by Suleyman Dost ("Towards a Theory of Peninsular Origins") aptly expresses this renewed scholarly appreciation of the Arabian environment in which the Islamic scripture inscribes itself.[5]

Two key categories of evidence about the religious life and literary culture of pre-quranic Arabia are epigraphy and pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. The importance of the former for understanding doctrines and practices critiqued by the Quran has lately been highlighted

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Author's note: Page references in the notes for volumes that include both Latin and Arabic pagination have [A] for the Arabic section. When I cite English translations of Arabic texts, my own renderings often depart from these. My transliteration of Arabic poetry and of the Quran employs *ă*, *ĭ*, and *ŭ* to mark vowels whose spelling would normally require lengthening but which must be pronounced short in order to avoid overlong syllables (e.g., *fĭ l-ḥisāb* rather than *fī l-ḥisāb*). The slash sign (/) indicates the division between two hemistichs of a verse of poetry. Biographical references for a given poet are normally provided when he or she is first referenced or mentioned (see the Index of Names). For a comprehensive reference work that covers most of the poets I quote, see Sezgin 1975.

1. Crone 2016: 1–20; Shoemaker 2003; Durie 2018: 13–18. All dates given are common era unless specified otherwise.

2. Sinai 2017a: 40–77.

3. For a detailed study on Allāt, see Krone 1992. The point in the main text is made, for instance, in Crone 2016: 56; Sinai 2017a: 61. Suleyman Dost (2017: 54–55) notes some Arabian deities, such as Dushara, whom one might have expected to figure in the Quran but who are in fact absent. Elsewhere, Dost suggests, with appropriate caveats, that the deities listed in Q 71:23 may be primarily South Arabian (pp. 44–50).

4. Webb 2016: 115–16; Saleh 2018: 88–90.

5. Dost 2017.

by Ilkka Lindstedt in a brief survey of polytheistic beliefs and rites that are attested in Ancient North Arabian inscriptions.[6] Lindstedt singles out the voluminous corpus of Safaitic graffiti, conventionally estimated to have been produced between the first century BCE and the fourth century and found in what is today southern Syria, northern Jordan, and northern Saudi Arabia, as a particularly promising source.[7] These inscriptions are now conveniently accessible through Ahmad Al-Jallad's detailed *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions* as well as the "Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia" directed by Michael C. A. Macdonald, both of which have yet to be routinely utilized by quranic scholars.[8]

The situation is different, and more complex, with regard to pre-Islamic poetry. Earlier generations of Western scholars, such as Julius Wellhausen, Carl Brockelmann, and Josef Horovitz, utilized poetry as a vital source for illuminating the Quran's intellectual milieu. Partly due to the field's skeptical turn in the late 1970s, this is no longer general scholarly practice. To be sure, Angelika Neuwirth has continued to champion the significance of poetry.[9] Nonetheless, there is still reason to agree with Thomas Bauer's 2010 lament that despite "hundreds of elaborate and lengthy literary texts which were *au courant* at the time of the revelation of the Qurʾan," contemporary scholars of the Quran "appear to do little more than shrug their shoulders at these riches."[10] A similar note was struck a few years earlier by James Montgomery.[11] One must not, of course, overlook that the transmission, compilation, and codification (and also the misattribution, reordering, reworking, and downright fabrication) of ancient Arabic poetry played a crucial role in what Rina Drory has termed the "Abbasid construction of the Jahiliyya."[12] As a result, the authenticity of individual lines of allegedly pre-quranic poetry and even that of entire poems is often difficult to establish conclusively. Yet it is hardly justified to infer from this the possibility or even likelihood that the entire corpus of pre-Islamic poetry may be a post-quranic fab-

6. Lindstedt 2018: 165–69. On the different dialects of Ancient North Arabian and their relationship to Old Arabic, the precursor of Classical Arabic, see Macdonald 2004; Al-Jallad 2018.

7. On the question of the date of the Safaitic inscriptions, see the cautious remarks in Al-Jallad 2015: 17–18.

8. See Al-Jallad 2015 and http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/. References to the latter will be accompanied by the siglum assigned to the respective inscription. Full bibliographical references can be found at the bottom of each database entry.

9. For a synthetic presentation of her insights in this regard, see Neuwirth 2010: 672–722 (= Neuwirth 2019b: 419–52). For a fascinating attempt at harnessing the interpretive potential of poetry by a modern Islamic scholar of the Quran, see al-Farāhī 2002. Recourse to poetry is, of course, standard in much premodern Islamic exegesis.

10. Bauer 2010: 700.

11. Montgomery 2006: 76–78. See also El Masri 2016: 256.

12. Drory 1996. As Drory observes in a discussion of the role of transmitters, "collective memory provided the guide as to what was to be recalled, and it set the boundaries of permissible adjustments, deviations and even reworking of the poems" (p. 39). For a case study of differences in the verse order of one poem, arguing that these discrepancies are at least in part the result of deliberate choices by literary compilers and editors, see Montgomery 1997: 25–40, 258.

rication that cannot in principle tell us anything about, say, pre-Islamic understandings of the human condition and of the divine—notions that are in many ways at odds with Islamic ones.[13] In fact, even in the case of such highly suspicious authors as Umayya ibn Abī l-Ṣalt it is feasible to make a credible case for the authenticity of specific passages.[14]

It is therefore arguable that in the same way as many quranic scholars have honed their facility in accessing and utilizing Syriac literature over the course of the last two decades, so the field stands in need of relearning to use poetic material as a valid, albeit in some respects recalcitrant, resource for the Quran's historical contextualization. The present essay is an attempt to contribute to this by reassessing how poetry, and more briefly the epigraphic record, can help us reconstruct pre-quranic Arabian notions of the deity whose name is *allāh*.

The word *allāh* is by far the most frequent quranic designation of God, occurring well over 2,500 times. I shall render it by "Allāh" throughout this essay, in order to avoid importing prior assumptions about Allāh's nature and functions merely by a translator's penstroke.[15] As shown by the data examined below and in line with the understanding of premodern Islamic sources, a god by the name of Allāh had significant currency among pagan (i.e., not formally Jewish or Christian) inhabitants of Arabia. By virtue of its partly pagan background, the prehistory of the word *allāh* thus differs from the Quran's other main divine name, *al-raḥmān* ("the Merciful"), which is now widely agreed to have reached the quranic milieu from Southern Arabia, where its cognate *raḥmānān* occurs in monotheistic inscriptions that are either explicitly Jewish or at least display a strong affinity with Judaism.[16]

In exploring pre-quranic Arabian notions of Allāh, I am self-consciously treading in the footsteps of a string of venerable predecessors—among whom Julius Wellhausen, Carl Brockelmann, Toshihiko Izutsu, Susanne Krone, Jawād ʿAlī, and ʿAbd al-Ghanī Zaytūnī—

13. Wagner 1987: 12–29. David S. Margoliouth notoriously argued that "all ostensibly pre-Islamic verse" should be considered "suspect" and that it is probable that "both poetry and rhymed prose are in the main derived from the Qur'an" (Margoliouth 1925: 448). His argument is in part predicated on the religious content of poetry said to be pre-Islamic, and he seems to assume that the existence of *some* supposedly pre-Islamic poetry that was clearly fabricated by Muslim authors entails that *all* of it is of doubtful authenticity (pp. 434–40). Quite apart from the fact that the underlying inference (which is not explicitly spelled out) is patently unsound, Margoliouth fails to develop anything like a plausible scenario for what might have motivated later Muslims to produce a vast corpus of allegedly pre-Islamic poetry of which only a relatively small part consists in the pious Islamic aphorisms that he treats as representative of it. For an attempt to circumvent the question of authenticity altogether, see Stetkevych 1986.

14. Sinai 2011; Seidensticker 2011.

15. Hence, when I render quranic passages as speaking about Allāh rather than God, this is not meant to imply any denial that the quranic God is the same deity as the God of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Church Fathers, and the Rabbis.

16. See Jeffery 2007: 140–41; Christian Robin, in Fisher 2015: 133, 136; Dost 2017: 59–63; Gajda 2017: 253–54; Robin and Rijziger 2018: 280–83. For a comprehensive treatment of monotheism in Ḥimyar, see Gajda 2009.

while also being inspired by, yet taking issue with, aspects of Aziz Al-Azmeh's recent treatment of the pre-Islamic Allāh.[17] The main lines of the picture I shall paint will be recognizably familiar to experts, insofar as I argue for a significant degree of continuity between quranic theology and earlier Arabian notions of Allāh, even if my principal motive in doing so is to discern more clearly what is distinctive and innovative about the quranic proclamations when placed against the background of their historical context of emergence. In any case, the main contribution of this essay will not be to propose a radically novel understanding of how the Quran relates to pre-quranic Arabian discourses, but rather to supply an up-to-date synthesis and reasonably detailed discussion of a fairly comprehensive array of the most pertinent pieces of poetic evidence, quoted as directly as possible rather than referenced at second or third remove.

It will be helpful to provide a concise overview of the trajectory of this essay. I begin with some reflections on the relationship between the word *allāh* and the expression *al-ilāh*, "the god" or "the deity," and argue that an etymological link between them would have been presupposed by pre-Islamic speakers of Arabic (§2). I then move on to consider what we can learn about Allāh's status and functions from our chronologically earliest sources—Ancient North Arabian inscriptions—which are conventionally estimated to take us up to ca. 400 CE (§3). Allāh's relative lack of prominence in the epigraphic record is thrown into particular relief when one juxtaposes it with the beliefs about Allāh that the Quran ascribes to its pagan opponents (§4). As previous scholars have duly recognized, for the quranic pagans Allāh was a creator god with a wide range of powers. I then turn to evidence from pre-quranic poetry, which will occupy the bulk of the essay. I preface my survey of the poetic data with an account of the nature and extent of post-quranic revision to which the poetry under consideration may be assumed to have been exposed, as well as an outline of the criteria by which I propose to judge whether a piece of poetry that is presented as pre-Islamic may in fact be accepted as such (§5). Specifically, I eschew reliance on poetry that exhibits significant overlap with quranic phraseology; I strive to cumulate poetic prooftexts wherever possible; and I endeavor to triangulate what poetry says or implies about Allāh with the views that the Quran attributes to its pagan opponents, as delineated in §4. This is followed by a thematically structured conspectus of the most important poetic evidence (§§6–9). What will emerge from the latter is a significant degree of correspondence with the beliefs about Allāh that were held by the Quran's pagan adversaries. Such mutual corroboration, I argue, confirms that the poetic record does in fact provide us with nonanachronistic insights into pre-quranic notions of Allāh. Finally, §10 recapitulates this general correspondence and a number of important discrepancies that have arisen along the way. This concluding section also considers the historical context that may help us explain Allāh's significant surge in prominence between the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, reflecting Allāh's position in the early centuries of the common era, and the poetic record and the Quran, reflecting his status in the sixth and early seventh centuries.

17. Wellhausen 1897; Brockelmann 1922; Izutsu 1964; Krone 1992: 457–91; ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 102–35; Zaytūnī 1987: 175–272; Al-Azmeh 2014: 164–357.

Before commencing, I should like to acknowledge straight away that my discussion of early Arabic poetry does not purport to be an exercise in literary criticism. I do not pretend to have anything to contribute to debates about the structure and function of early Arabic poetry, even though these are undoubtedly important topics of research. Instead, I examine mostly single lines or brief verse groups of poetry and attempt to tease out the theological notions reflected or invoked by them, and to determine how these compare to theological notions that are mirrored in far less sophisticated inscriptional material as well as to the beliefs and practices that are critiqued in the Quran. My recourse to poetry rests on the assumption that poetic aphorisms and formulae, however literary and conventionalized, are sufficiently embedded in a specific religious and cultural context in order to tell us something about the understanding of Allāh that was current in this context, just as early Arabic poetry might tell us something, say, about military practices or patterns of animal husbandry that existed in its historical milieu. For instance, I would maintain that if we encounter a poetic formula such as *jazā llāhu* ("May Allāh requite/recompense"), this permits us to infer that Allāh could intelligibly and plausibly—however casually—be invoked as a source of moral reward and punishment: the discursive fact that Allāh figures repeatedly as the subject of the verb *jazā*, in other words, carries significance as a religio-historical piece of evidence.[18] This fairly minimalist premise in no way entails that poetry is nothing more than a depot of incidental cultural information about pre-Islamic Arabia; to recognize that it constitutes complex literature in its own right, which merits the full application of contemporary methods of literary analysis, does not preclude that it may also assist us in shedding light on the cultural, religious, economic, and even ecological environment from which it hails,[19] just as the Quran can be legitimately used in order to illuminate its own cultural, religious, linguistic, ecological, etc. context.

18. But *is* it a discursive fact that Allāh routinely figures as the subject of the verb *jazā* in pre-Islamic usage? See below for further considerations on the issue of authenticity vs. pseudepigraphy.

19. This is emphatically argued in Montgomery 2006: 77.

2. Allāh = "the God" (*al-ilāh*)?

What is the semantic charge of the word *allāh*? Should we suppose that pre-quranic speakers of Arabic effectively treated it as a basic proper name without any significant semantic content apart from its referential link to a specific deity, as maintained by Aziz Al-Azmeh,[20] or may we assume that the term carried some descriptive meaning? The Kufan school of Arabic grammar famously considers *allāh* to be a contraction of *al-ilāh*, "the god,"[21] and if this is correct, it would lend support to the second position (although etymologies can, of course, be forgotten or, even if remembered, do not necessarily dictate and circumscribe subsequent usage).

The uncontracted form *al-ilāh* is relatively well attested in the epigraphic record. It occurs, for instance, in the Arabic portion of a trilingual inscription from a martyrion at Zabad dated to 512. Although the reading of the beginning of this inscription is not certain, it would seem to run: "May the deity remember (*dkr ʾl-ʾlh*) Sergius."[22] The same formula of remembrance, together with *ʾl-ʾlh*, also appears in an inscription in (almost entirely) Arabic script dating to 548 or 549 and found near Dūma in what is today Saudi Arabia, and it is also a plausible reading for another Nabataeo-Arabic inscription from Dūma.[23] A further instance of *ʾl-ʾlh* has been discovered in the vicinity of Najrān, accompanied by a cross.[24] Finally, *al-ilāh* figures in the founding inscription of a monastery in al-Ḥīra from around 560 that is cited by premodern Islamic geographers.[25] As we shall see below, there is earlier evidence for the contracted form *allāh* in pagan inscriptions. In contrast with this, the data just surveyed—at least some of which is explicitly Christian—suggest that sixth-century Christians were still holding on to the uncontracted form *al-ilāh*.[26] The reason for this may simply have been the isomorphism between *al-ilāh* and Greek *ho theos*, the Septuagint's usual rendering of Hebrew *ʾĕlōhîm* when applied to the god of Israel. One is tempted to conjecture that the Christian employment of *al-ilāh* was motivated by a deliberate attempt to differentiate the biblical god from the pagan Allāh; but this hypothesis is called into doubt by the interchangeability of *al-ilāh* and *allāh* in early Arabic poetry even when composed by the Christian ʿAdī ibn Zayd (see below).

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20. Al-Azmeh 2014: 300–301.
21. E.g., al-Thaʿlabī 2015, 2: 288.
22. Michael Macdonald, in Fisher 2015: 410–11; Kiltz 2012: 37–38.
23. Nehmé 2017: 125–31.
24. Robin et al. 2014: 1099–1102.
25. Nehmé 2017: 130–31, 153–54. For the Arabic text as cited in Yāqūt's *Muʿjam al-buldān*, see Wüstenfeld 1867: 709, where *al-ilāh* occurs in l. 7. Although l. 9 of the Wüstenfeld edition then goes on to use *allāh*, the version cited in al-Bakrī's *Muʿjam mā istaʿjama min asmāʾ al-bilād wa-l-mawāḍiʿ* twice employs *al-ilāh* (al-Bakrī 1945–51: 606).
26. According to Nehmé (2017: 130), *al-ilāh* is "the normal Christian pre-Islamic name for God."

In any case, the inscriptions noted above demonstrate that the form *al-ilāh* is not an etymological posit but was current in the pre-Islamic period. From a linguistic perspective, the derivation *allāh* < *al-ilāh* is entirely plausible,[27] even if the supposedly parallel case of the name of the goddess Allāt, often held to be contracted from **al-ilāhat* or **al-ilāt*, has not gone unchallenged.[28] While it has been claimed that the word *allāh* is a borrowing from Syriac *allāhā*,[29] an inner-Arabic derivation of *allāh* is in fact preferable; as both Susanne Krone and David Kiltz have pointed out, it is the Syriac *allāhā* with its initial *a* vowel (rather than an *i* or *e* vowel, as would have been expected based on Northwest Semitic cognates) that is morphologically anomalous and not convincingly explicable as an inner-Syriac development, while Arabic *allāh* can be readily explained without recourse to a hypothetical extra-Arabic borrowing. Given that the similarity of Arabic *allāh* and Syriac *allāhā* cannot be coincidental, it seems more likely that it is the Syriac term that was adopted from Arabic rather than vice versa.[30]

Just as inscriptions in Nabataean Aramaic often refer to the main Nabataean deity Dushara simply as *ʾlhʾ*, "the god,"[31] so the designation *allāh* < *al-ilāh*, "the god," may originally have emerged as a reverential epithet that replaced the respective deity's proper name.[32] But even if one were to remain doubtful as to whether the derivation of *allāh* from *al-ilāh* gives us the true linguistic origin of the Quran's principal divine name, this etymology evidently presented itself already to speakers of Old Arabic in the centuries prior to the Quran rather than just being a post-quranic postulate or a recondite product of "the labour of classical Arab linguists," as Al-Azmeh puts it.[33] For example, two verses from a poem attributed to al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī that praises the Ghassānid ruler ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥārith and his ancestors employ the expressions *allāh* and *al-ilāh* (which evidently have different metrical valences) synonymously.[34] Other poetry, including a piece attributed to the Christian ʿAdī ibn Zayd, likewise interchanges them.[35] Accordingly, it stands to reason that at

27. Kiltz 2012.

28. Hämeen-Anttila and Rollinger 2001. For a skeptical assessment of the derivation *allāh* < *al-ilāh*, see Al-Azmeh 2014: 296–301.

29. Jeffery 2007: 66–67. On the question whether the Syriac word is *allāhā* (with gemination) or *alāhā*, see Kiltz 2012: 41–42.

30. Krone 1992: 61, 464–465; Kiltz 2012.

31. Healey 2001: 85, 92.

32. Robin 2012: 305.

33. Al-Azmeh 2014: 296.

34. Ahlwardt 1870: 3[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 1, vv. 23–24); regarding the recipients, see vv. 4, 7 and Fayṣal 1968: 54. In the recension of Ibn al-Sikkīt the two verses appear earlier in the poem and with variants (Fayṣal 1968: 56 = no. 4, vv. 8–9), but the sequence of *allāh* and *al-ilāh* is found here too. The passage is also quoted in Izutsu 1964: 110–11 and Kiltz 2012: 38. On al-Nābigha, who was active as a panegyrist at the court of the Lakhmid (or Naṣrid) ruler al-Nuʿmān III at al-Ḥīra and also at the Ghassānid (or Jafnid) court of Jābiya and who is quoted at important junctures in this essay, see Arazi 1993.

35. A poem on the creation of the world that is attributed to ʿAdī (although not contained in his *dīwān*) speaks of *ilāh al-khalq* ("the God of creation") in v. 2, of Adam's "lord" (*rabbuhu*) in v. 12,

least those Arabic speakers who employed *al-* as the definite article would have perceived in the name *allāh* a latent connotation of "the god par excellence." Of course, the extent to which this semantic potential was activated would have depended on the term's actual discursive deployment. Quranic statements such as "Allāh—there is no god (*ilāh*) but him" (*allāhu lā ilāha illā huwa*, e.g., Q 2:255; 3:2; 4:87; 64:13) may be viewed as emphatically underlining the definite article that is detectable in the word *allāh*, and as concerned to ensure that the article's semantic force is understood to be not only paradigmatic but rather exclusive.

and Allāh in vv. 9 and 16 of the version pieced together in Dmitriev 2010: 353, 360, 366, 373; cf. al-Muʿaybid 1965: 158–60 (no. 103, vv. 2, 10, 14, lacking Dmitriev's v. 9). See also Lyall 1918–24, 1: 307–8, 2: 106 (no. 28, vv. 13 and 16, by al-Muthaqqib al-ʿAbdī) as well as Schulthess 1911: 25–29, 84–87 (no. 25, vv. 1, 10, 13, 23, 30, 36; see Seidensticker 2011: 47–49). On ʿAdī ibn Zayd, see Horovitz 1930; Sezgin 1975: 178–79; Seidensticker 2009. As the latter notes, the authenticity of ʿAdī's poetry was not above dispute already in the premodern period.

3. Allāh in Ancient North Arabian Epigraphy

Our earliest safe indication for the existence of an individual deity by the name *allāh* are inscriptions in various Ancient North Arabian dialects, such as Dadanitic, Safaitic, and Thamudic. As argued in this section, at least some (although by no means all) epigraphic instances of the word *ʾlh* or *lh* occur in a context where the term must designate a specific individual deity rather than function merely as a generic appellative ("god") that served as a title or epithet for more than one deity.[36] The expression appears, first, as a component of Arabic theophoric names, such as *whblh*. The Greek transliterations of Arabic names in bilingual Safaitic and Nabataean inscriptions and in the Nessana papyri establish that the words *ʾlh* or *lh* were indeed pronounced *allāh* here; accordingly, *whblh* is to be read *wahballāh*, "gift of the god" or perhaps even "gift of Allāh."[37] Secondly, *ʾlh* and *lh* occur in invocations. Safaitic graffiti provides examples such as the following: "O *ʾlh*, [grant] relief [to] whoever comes to the watering-place" (*w rwḥ h ʾlh mn wrd*),[38] "O *ʾlh*, [grant] rain" (*h ʾlh ġṯ*),[39] "O *ʾlh*, [grant] the booty" (*h ʾlh h-ġnmt*),[40] "O *ʾlh*, [grant] security" (*h ʾlh sʿlm*).[41] Similar petitions employ the spelling *lh* rather than *ʾlh*.[42] Particularly captivating is a text whose carver states that he "made a burnt offering and swore by *ʾlh*, who is living, that he shall lead with greatness" (*ʾṣly w ʾqsʿm b-ʾlh ḥy l-hdy ʿẓm*).[43] There is little ground

36. Krone 1992: 457–64. The epigraphic record also contains the variants *ʾly*, *ʾlhy*, and *lhy*, with the final *y* having been construed either as a genitive ending or as the first-person possessive suffix (Krone 1992: 460; for a case in which the genitive construal is clearly the correct one, see Al-Jallad 2017a: 107). On the vocative form *h lhm*, which may be compared to Arabic *allāhumma*, see Al-Jallad 2017a: 104. There are also inscriptions that have *ʾlhn*, which is perhaps a vestige of nunation (Al-Jallad 2015: 69), e.g., http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0031262.html (SSWS 186).

37. Krone 1992: 58, 461–63; Al-Jallad 2017a: 107, 132, 163, 168.

38. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0025904.html (AbaNS 1123).

39. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0004750.html (C 1545). For another invocation for rain addressed to *lh*, see Al-Jallad 2017b: 84: "let the rain flow, O *lh*" (*w hmr ygy h lh*).

40. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0005063.html (C 1859).

41. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0018597.html (ZeGA 1).

42. E.g., "O *lh*, [grant] relief and [send] two [years] of dearth to whoever scratches out the writing" (*h lh rwḥ w mḥltn l-ḏ yʿwr h-sʿfr*, see http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0022180.html = KRS 1551).

43. See http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0016976.html (SIJ 293). See also Al-Jallad 2015: 161. Safaitic *hdy* refers to human leadership, as opposed to its quranic use for divine guidance; see Al-Jallad 2015: 317. This usage has parallels in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry; see, e.g., Izutsu 1964: 144–46, citing a verse from al-Shanfarā's *Lāmiyyat al-ʿarab*, found in Jones 1992: 152–53, and another verse from the *dīwān* of ʿAbīd corresponding to Lyall 1913: 62^{A} and 49 (no. 21, v. 12).

for discerning any clear functional specialization of *ʾlh*, however, as other deities are likewise implored for relief, security, booty, and even rain.[44] It may be worthwhile adding that an alleged depiction of Allāh as a rider-god that has been perceived in a second-century Palmyrene relief probably represents a different deity.[45]

With some justification, Aziz Al-Azmeh has cautioned against assuming Allāh to be the "default translation" of *ʾlh* or *lh*.[46] After all, either might well serve as a general noun or appellative ("god"), corresponding to Arabic *ilāh* (e.g., Q 2:133, 163 or 52:43), rather than as the effective proper name of a particular deity, corresponding to *allāh*.[47] Some epigraphic formulations clearly require this appellative meaning. For instance, in the plea "O *bʿlsʿmn*, god of *sʿʿʿ*, [grant] security" (*h bʿlsʿmn ʾlh sʿʿʿ sʿlm*),[48] *ʾlh* is used as a general descriptor for the deity Baʿl-Samīn, and the same applies to "O *ṣlm*, god of Dūma" (*h ṣlm ʾlh dmt*).[49] The invocation *h ʾlh ṯmd*, too, is best taken to mean "O god of the Thamūd."[50] Moreover, any address of the "gods" in the plural ("O gods," *hy ʾʾlht*) obviously presupposes a generic sense of *ʾlh*.[51]

Nonetheless, there are also inscriptions in which either *ʾlh* or *lh* manifestly functions as the name of a particular deity. A case in point is a well-known epitaph from Qaryat al-Fāw that has been dated to around the turn of the common era and in which the grave at hand is entrusted "to Kahl and *lh* and ʿAththar" (*b-khl w-lh w-ʿṯr*).[52] Similarly, an inscription appealing to both *lh* and *sʾʿhqm* for "abundance and safety from whoever is on guard" (*h lh w h sʾʿhqm ġnyt w sʿlm m-ḏ ḫrṣ*) would appear to list two distinct deities side by side.[53] There is at least one further likely instance of such an enumerative use of *lh*, where the term is paired with Ruḍā (*rḍw*).[54] In all these cases, the reading *allāh*—whose vocalization, as we saw, is supported by the Greek transliteration of theophoric names such as *whblh*—is eminently plausible. It would seem that in such enumerative uses of *ʾlh* and *lh*, the term's putatively original significance "the god" or "the god par excellence" had to some degree worn away, leaving the word to behave like a proper name picking out one deity among others, without necessarily implying that the god in question was superior to the others

44. E.g., "O Baʿl-Samīn, [grant] sufficient rain" (*h bʿlsʿmn ġnyt b-mṭr*); http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0013008.html (WH 2143).

45. See Starcky [1956] (whose interpretation is endorsed in Krone 1992: 463) and the criticism of this position in Drijvers 1972: 368 n. 3.

46. Al-Azmeh 2014: 290, 292.

47. Krone 1992: 467–71.

48. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0015351.html (CSNS 424). See also Krone 1992: 469 n. 80.

49. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0020658.html (KRS 30).

50. Krone 1992: 459, 469.

51. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0021916.html (KRS 1287). See also http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0026891.html (Is.M 121).

52. Beeston 1979; Robin, in Fisher 2015: 102; Robin 2001: 548–50; Al-Jallad 2014.

53. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0018625.html (ZeWA 1).

54. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0006255.html (C 3051; Dunand 779 a). On Ruḍā, see Krone 1992: 441–56; Healey 2001: 94–95.

named. At least once, Allāh is invoked together with Allāt (*ʾlt*),[55] but as Krone notes, there is not enough epigraphic evidence to warrant considering Allāh to be Allāt's *paredros*, or male companion.[56]

The quranic contrast between the proper name (or quasi-proper name) *allāh* and the appellative *ilāh* thus maps well onto some of the Ancient North Arabian epigraphic data. There remains nonetheless a substantial class of inscriptions whose affinity with the former or the latter usage requires careful case-by-case assessment. Particularly difficult to place are succinct references or appeals to *ʾlh* or *lh* like "O *ʾlh*, [grant] rain," in which the word neither forms the first element of a genitive construction nor figures in an enumeration of several distinct deities (which would suggest that it is used in a naming capacity rather than as an appellative). When a Dadanitic inscription states that a certain priest of Ḏ-Ġbt "offered two statues to *lh* (*l-lh*)," it is possible that *l-lh* here means simply "to the god," i.e., the god in context, meaning Ḏ-Ġbt, the principal deity of ancient Dedan.[57] Accordingly, in Dadanitic inscriptions, even a self-standing invocation like "O *lh*, favor him and help him" could with some justification be taken to address Ḏ-Ġbt.[58] As regards theophoric names like *wahballāh*, one may well prefer to remain cautious as to whether they intend Allāh or whether the theophoric element *-allāh* retains an equivalence with *al-ilāh* here, as a result of which it would denote whichever principal deity was being worshipped in a given locale: in the Nabataean context at least, the deity in question may well be Dushara.[59] Overall, the Ancient North Arabian data that provide conclusive evidence for an individual deity by the name of Allāh, while not absent, are relatively limited, and other deities like Ruḍā and Allāt have a more frequent presence.[60]

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55. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0037971.html (AMSI 84).

56. Krone 1992: 487–88.

57. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0034200.html (JSLih 061); Krone 1992: 457, 468–69. However, other inscriptions demonstrate that priests of one god would sometimes perform an act of worship directed at another; see http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0037786.html (AH 199) and http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0037792.html (JSLih 049).

58. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0033691.html (JSLih 008).

59. Healey 2001: 23–24; Kiltz 2012: 39. By contrast, Krone 1992: 472 suggests that Nabataean theophoric names with the component *-allāh* reveal an older stratum of Nabataean religion in which the main deity was Allāh rather than Dushara.

60. See also the recent assessment that "Safaitic inscriptions provide a very small selection of Allāh-references compared to the breadth of the corpus" (Dost 2017: 57). If indeed it is Allāh who is referred to in such theophoric names as *wahballāh*, this relative dearth of invocations seems puzzling (see Krone 1992: 471–72). One solution, favored by Krone, is to posit that theophoric names potentially go back to a more ancient stage of religious history than the inscriptions in which they are preserved, and that Allāh therefore "originates from a more ancient, more primeval layer of the pantheon." This would, however, yield a curious fluctuation according to which Allāh's significance went from high (as attested by theophoric names) to low (as attested by the relative lack of invocations in Ancient North Arabian inscriptions) back to high (as attested by pre-Islamic poetry and the quranic portrayal of the Associators). Another possibility, intimated above, is to conjecture that the component *-allāh* in theophoric names might simply be an epithet meaning "the god."

4. Allāh in the Worldview of the Quranic Pagans

Leaping ahead several centuries from the Safaitic inscriptions to the Quran, we find that by the early sixth century Allāh has undergone a dramatic gain in status and functions. Crucially, this not only applies to the Quran's own theology, but also to the statements that the Quran ascribes to a group of ostensibly pagan opponents, who form the quranic Messenger's main adversaries in the Meccan suras and on the recovery of whose beliefs Gerald Hawting and Patricia Crone have done essential work.[61] These opponents evidently accord considerable power and importance to Allāh. Several verses formulaically assert that they believe him to have created the cosmos as a whole: "If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will say Allāh" (*wa-la-in saʾaltahum man khalaqa l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa la-yaqūlunna llāhu*; Q 29:61; 31:25; 39:38; 43:9 has a slight variant).[62] One verse (Q 43:87) reports a similar question with regard to the creation of humans: "If you ask them who created them (*man khalaqahum*), they will say Allāh."[63] The Quran's Meccan opponents are similarly portrayed as deeming Allāh to have "harnessed the sun and the moon" (Q 29:61), to "send down rain from the sky" (Q 29:63), to reign over the earth and the heavens, and to exercise "dominion" (*malakūt*) over everything (Q 23:84–89).[64] The Quran also appears to assume that Allāh was recognized as the patron deity of the Meccan sanctuary: Q 27:91 calls the quranic god "the lord of this settlement" (*rabb hādhihi l-balda*) and Q 106:1–4 exhorts the Quraysh to worship "the lord of this house," meaning the Meccan Kaʿba, "who has fed them against hunger and secured them against fear."[65] It would seem that the Quran's pagan opponents are assumed to share the view that Allāh is the patron of the Meccan sanctuary, as if they are being reminded of a generally accepted fact: the argument of Q 106 is not that the "house" has a divine lord but that this lord has a claim to being duly thanked and worshipped.

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61. Hawting 1999: 45–66; Crone 2016; see also Welch 1980. For a justification of my contention that these opponents were indeed pagans, see Sinai 2017a: 65–72; on the distinction between Meccan and Medinan suras, see Sinai 2017a: 124–30.

62. The identity of "them" is particularly clear at Q 31:25, insofar as the preceding two verses speak about *man kafara*.

63. Here, too, the identity of the opponents who are quoted is reasonably unequivocal: the preceding verse begins, "Those whom they invoke besides him have no power to intercede" (*wa-lā yamliku lladhīna yadʿūna min dūnihi l-shafāʿata*).

64. Brockelmann 1922: 105; ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 103–5; Zaytūnī 1987: 239, 241; Welch 1980: 736; Crone 2016: 54–55.

65. Q 27:91 as well as 28:57 and 29:67 also credit Allāh with having established the Meccan *ḥaram*, or sacred precinct. Q 28:57 and 29:67 particularly highlight the sanctuary's safety (*ʾ-m-n*). See also Q 14:35–37, where the link between Allāh, on the one hand, and "this settlement" or Allāh's "inviolable house," on the other, is dated back to the time of Abraham. On the question of the location of the quranic sanctuary, see Sinai 2017a: 47–52, 59–72.

The Quran therefore documents that both the community of Believers around Muḥammad and their pagan opponents accepted Allāh as a supremely powerful creator and probably also as the patron deity of the local sanctuary. This conclusion implies a rejection of Al-Azmeh's critique that Crone "projects onto Muḥammad's adversaries the fully developed Qurʾānic theology that he sought to make theirs, and that he polemically told them was his and theirs as well."[66] In fact, Crone's attempt to extract from the Quran the belief system of its pagan adversaries is predicated on the exceedingly plausible supposition that it would not be an effective polemical strategy on the part of the Quran to appeal to premises allegedly granted by its opponents if these opponents, as well as Muḥammad's adherents, were in a position to dismiss the positions ascribed to them as glaringly inaccurate. Matters would be different, of course, if we had grounds for doubting that the quranic proclamations are really addressing the opponents they purport to be addressing; but there is no reason, in my view, to consider the Quran's extensive polemics to be a literary conceit.[67] Hence, even if quranic depictions of the beliefs and practices of Muḥammad's opponents may well exhibit a pervasive lack of hermeneutic charity and a degree of rhetorical exaggeration and strategic misrepresentation, all of these phenomena are very unlikely to extend as far as Al-Azmeh would seem to posit. Consequently, his denial of the claim that "Allāh had already been duly worshipped and conceived as a transcendent creator" prior to the emergence of the Quran is difficult to reconcile with a proper appreciation of the quranic evidence (and also, as we shall see, of the poetic evidence).[68]

The quranic pagans' recognition of Allāh's "dominion over everything" (Q 23:88–89) may appear to stand in tension with Q 45:24, where the Quran's opponents are reported to say, "There is nothing but this life; we die and we live; what destroys us is nothing but the course of time (*wa-mā yuhlikunā illă l-dahru*)."[69] The primary point of the opponents' utterance, however, would seem to be their opening denial that there is "nothing but this life," which recurs elsewhere in the Quran followed by the addendum "We shall not be resurrected" (Q 6:29; 23:37). For the quranic pagans, there was no credible threat of eternal damnation: however powerful they may have believed Allāh to be, they did not consider him to be an eschatological judge or at least entertained strong doubts about the notion of an eschatological resurrection, even if they must have been familiar with this doctrine and also with standard arguments against it, an acquaintance that does not seem to have result-

66. Al-Azmeh 2014: 280 n. 2.

67. See also Sinai 2017a: 49, 51. This basic premise of Crone's work is presented very clearly and succinctly in Crone 2016: 315, emphasizing that the quranic Messenger "was not working at a safe distance from his opponents, but rather preaching to them face to face, hoping to convert them. This obviously placed a limit on the amount of distortion he could engage in if he was to have hope of gaining a hearing."

68. Al-Azmeh 2014: 279. For illustrations of the limited kind of rhetorical distortion that may well characterize the quranic portrayal of Muḥammad's adversaries, see nn. 70 and 71 below.

69. On this verse, see also Crone 2016: 144–49, 159–62.

ed merely from their exposure to the quranic proclamations.[70] In the adversarial statement quoted at Q 45:24, this principal point is then supported by a subsidiary one, namely, that even when human individuals or entire collectives perish and die, this is simply a feature of the world's natural course. It is pertinent that the Quran uses the same verb "to destroy" (*ahlaka*) to designate Allāh's punitive obliteration of past communities or generations (e.g., Q 28:43, 58, 78). The quranic pagans, or some of them, may have been pushed to deny Allāh being the cause of such devastations by way of a secondary response to the standard quranic argument that the downfall of erstwhile powerful communities demonstrates Allāh's power to resurrect and punish evildoers on the day of judgment.[71] Whatever the background to Q 45:24, it seems clear that the Quran's pagan opponents did not generally view Allāh as incapable of intervening in the world he had created, for other passages portray them as imploring him to rescue them from situations of distress, whether ashore or at sea (Q 6:63–64; 10:22–23; 17:67–69; 29:65; 31:32).

Apart from doubting or rejecting the idea that Allāh would orchestrate an eschatological judgment of the resurrected, the quranic pagans also disagreed with the quranic proposition that Allāh is the sole divine being: a great number of quranic passages take Muḥammad's opponents to task for "associating" (*sh-r-k*) other "gods" (*āliha*) with Allāh. These partner

70. Crone 2016: 125–82. Crone notes (pp. 125–26) that the Quran sometimes describes its opponents as simply being insufficiently concerned with the resurrection rather than denying that it will occur at all. For instance, Q 30:6–7 accuses "most people" of being "heedless of the final abode" (*wa-hum ʿani l-ākhirati hum ghāfilūn*). However, I am doubtful that the respective passages, which are relatively few, really provide solid evidence that the quranic opponents included some who "believed in the resurrection without regarding it as imminent" (p. 125). More likely, the Quran is here engaged in a rhetorically motivated conflation of principled denial of the resurrection with a foolish failure to give heed to something whose reality must, from the perspective of the quranic Messenger and his followers, be assumed as a given. Such conflation is well illustrated by Q 41:50, according to which humans (*al-insān*) are inveterately given to saying, "I do not think that the Hour will ever arise (*wa-mā aẓunnu l-sāʿata qāʾimatan*); and if I am ever returned to my Lord (*wa-la-in rujiʿtu ilā rabbī*), I shall have the best reward with him (*inna lī ʿindahū la-l-ḥusnā*)." A principled denial of the resurrection is here presented as shading into baseless eschatological optimism. Similarly, Q 30:8 states that "many people repudiate that they will meet their Lord" (*wa-inna kathīran mina l-nāsi bi-liqāʾi rabbihim la-kāfirūn*). Coming in close proximity to the accusation of heedlessness quoted above (Q 30:7), the impression is again that "negligence of the final abode" is ultimately equivalent to denial of the final judgment. By recasting the quranic pagans' well-attested denial of the resurrection as a lack of concern with something that ought to trump all worldly concerns, the Quran presents their stance as inherently untenable.

71. For an overview of this quranic train of thought, see Sinai 2017a: 169–72. Alternatively, Q 45:24 may be polemically simplifying and sharpening the position of the Quran's opponents. Given that some poetry, reviewed in §7 below, presents the effects of fate or the destructive course of time (*dahr*) as coinciding with the workings of Allāh or as decreed by him (see also Crone 2016: 159–61), it is conceivable that the quranic pagans did not in fact suppose the impact of *dahr* to be outside Allāh's control. Instead, they may have simply invoked the concept of *dahr* alongside Allāh, which from a quranic perspective was then deemed to entail an effective denial of Allāh's omnipotence, leading to a restatement of their position as *mā yuhlikunā illā l-dahru* at Q 45:24. I owe this second construal to Holger Zellentin.

deities (*shurakāʾ*; e.g., Q 13:16, 33; 16:27, 86) are rarely named, and even though the Quran is generally very economical with proper names, the persistent tendency to refer to the partner deities in anonymizing plural terms is probably also a deliberate rhetorical strategy.[72] As Crone has rightly insisted, the quranic charge of associationism (*shirk*) must not be understood to mean that the Associators worshipped other deities instead of Allāh, but rather that they recognized and worshipped them with (*maʿa*) him (e.g., Q 6:19; 72:18). It is not the Associators' failure to acknowledge and venerate Allāh, but rather their failure to do so *exclusively* with which the Quran takes issue.[73] Taking inspiration from Morton Smith's influential account of the ancient Israelite "Yahweh-alone party,"[74] it would not be amiss to think of the Quran as formulating an Allāh-alone theology; in both cases the opposing position, espoused by the social majority, was veneration of YHWH or Allāh alongside other deities.

The quranic Associators do not, on balance, seem to have regarded their supplementary deities as sharing in Allāh's role as cosmic creator and in his responsibility for maintaining the cycle of nature by sending down rain.[75] Rather, the partner deities rejected by Muḥammad and his followers had a subordinate status: the Associators seem to have described them as "offspring" (*walad*) or as daughters of Allāh, which may simply have been a metaphorical way of calling them divine yet inferior to Allāh,[76] and to have conceived of them as female angels (e.g., Q 17:40; 19:88–95; 37:149–53; 53:27).[77] Moreover, the Associators are quoted as casting their partner deities as "intercessors (*shufaʿāʾ*) with Allāh" (Q 10:18) and as serving to bring humans closer (*qarraba*) to him (Q 39:3, cf. 46:28).[78] Sacrifices of agricultural produce and of livestock were accordingly divided up between Allāh and the intermediary deities worshipped together with him (Q 6:136).[79] Despite the Associators' general tendency to approach Allāh through intermediaries, they would sometimes also appeal to him directly: as noted above, his assistance was sought on sea voyages and in situations of distress.[80] Allāh was also asked to grant healthy children (Q 7:189–90). In sum, Allāh's ultimate supremacy is something on which both the quranic Believers and their opponents are agreed; what is in dispute is, first, whether Allāh is not only a creator but also an eschatological judge and, second, whether there is a class of second-tier divine beings whose principal function is to mediate access to Allāh and who are therefore appropriate objects of cultic veneration alongside Allāh.

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72. There are only two quranic passages that name some of the deities in question, Q 53:19–20 and Q 71:23.

73. See Crone 2016: 52–101, esp. 61–64.

74. Smith 1987: 11–42.

75. Crone 2016: 59–61. But see Q 7:190, where the partner deities appear to be credited with bestowing children.

76. Wellhausen 1897: 24, 208. Interestingly, there is a Safaitic inscription that would appear to identify Allāt (*ʾlt*) not as the daughter of Allāh but as the daughter of Ruḍā (*rḍw*); see http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0030956.html (AWS 283).

77. Crone 2016: 57–59. See also Sinai 2017a: 68–69.

78. See Crone 2016: 58–59.

79. Apart from animal and food sacrifices, the Associators may also have practiced child sacrifice (see Q 6:137, 140, although these verses only speak of the "killing" of children).

80. Crone 2016: 62–63.

5. Pre-Quranic Poetry and the Issue of Authenticity

Many of the beliefs about Allāh that the Quran ascribes to Muḥammad's pagan opponents are matched by evidence from early Arabic poetry, to which we shall now turn. Although references to other deities such as al-ʿUzzā, Allāt, or Wadd (or Wudd) are by no means absent from this literature,[81] scholars have long been struck by the frequency with which Allāh appears in comparison to other gods and goddesses.[82] Thus, Albert Arazi and Salman Masalha's concordance of al-Aʿlam al-Shantamarī's (d. 1083) *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn fī dawāwīn al-shuʿarāʾ al-sitta al-jāhiliyyīn*—containing the poetry collections of Imruʾ al-Qays, Zuhayr, Ṭarafa, ʿAlqama, ʿAntara, and al-Nābigha—lists over fifty occurrences of the name Allāh,[83] and even more material is included in other collections and anthologies, e.g., al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī's (d. ca. 780) *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* and Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's (d. probably in the 970s) *Kitāb al-Aghānī*.[84] While trawling through these sources and previous publications on the topic at hand, it is justified to widen our focus beyond explicit in-

81. For two oaths by the god Wadd (Wudd), named at Q 71:23, see Lyall 1918–24, 1: 476, 2: 177 (no. 50, v. 11; Muraqqish al-Akbar, on whom, see Sezgin 1975: 153–54); Lyall 1919: 15, 20 (no. 2, v. 11; ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa, on whom, see Sezgin 1975: 152–53); both have *bi-wuddiki* "By [your god] Wudd." See Stein 2013 for a South Arabian minuscule inscription with an incantation of Wadd, carved into a palm-leaf stalk. For a reference to another tribal god (Yaʿbūb), see Lyall 1913: 13[A] and 21 (ʿAbīd, no. 2, v. 6). For an oath "by Allāt and the sacrificial stones (*anṣāb*)," found in the poetry of al-Mutalammis, see Vollers 1903: 23, 65 (no. 2, v. 1; also quoted in ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 111 n. 4). For an oath by al-ʿUzzā and Allāt, see Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 20: 139 l. 4 from bottom, quoted in Geyer 1919: 187 (attributed to al-Aʿshā). For another likely oath by al-ʿUzzā on the part of al-Aʿshā, see Geyer 1919: 206–12.

82. E.g., Nöldeke 1864: ix–x; Krone 1992: 214–15, 474.

83. Arazi and Masalha 1999: 1272–74 (whose Arabic text is based on Ahlwardt 1870, which I generally quote directly; on Ahlwardt's edition, see the remarks in Montgomery 2018: xvi–xix, drawing attention to its hybrid nature). Al-Azmeh (2014: 289) puzzlingly characterizes the data presented in the concordance of Arazi and Masalha by saying that derivatives of *ʾ-l-h* in Arazi and Masalha 1999 are only "documented sporadically" in these six poets, but he may be basing this description only on the entry *ilāh* in the main concordance, not on the entry *allāh* in the concordance of proper names. On the six poets compiled by al-Shantamarī, see Sezgin 1975: 109–26.

84. For the former, see Sezgin 1975: 53–54. For the latter, see Kilpatrick 2003; Günther 2007; on the compiler's death date in particular, see Kilpatrick 2003: 20. I cite *Kitāb al-Aghānī* according to the Būlāq edition (Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868]), whose pagination is given in the margins of Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī 1927–74; although the latter's text is superior, this policy will enable consultation of either edition (see also the concordance of the two editions in Kilpatrick 2003: 280–90 and her account of the work's editorial history on pp. 1–4). When the 1927–74 edition offers a variant text or vocalization that is relevant to my argument, I cite it directly.

vocations of Allāh and include poetic verses using the term *al-ilāh* (or *ilāh* with a following genitive). As noted in §2, some poems clearly deploy *al-ilāh* as a metrically useful variant of Allāh, and I am not currently aware of any pre-Islamic poetry in which the term *al-ilāh* cannot be thus construed, i.e., in which it is incontestably used of some other deity.[85] Furthermore, poetic occurrences of *rabb* + personal suffix in reference to a deity (e.g., *rabbī*, "my lord"), *rabb* as the first element of a relevant genitive construction (e.g., *rabb makka*, "the lord of Mecca"), and the epithet "the Merciful" (*al-raḥmān*) are also defensibly taken to refer to Allāh. *Rabb* with a possessive suffix is a standard quranic appellation for Allāh[86] and the same usage is encountered in poetry.[87] As for "the Merciful," which the Quran likewise treats as having the same reference as the name *allāh*,[88] it is far less frequent in poetry; but in the limited number of instances in which it occurs below, the roles and powers that poets assign to "the Merciful" are elsewhere ascribed to Allāh, making it justifiable to carry over the quranic equivalence. This is particularly clear in the case of a poem by al-Aʿshā that evokes *al-raḥmān* and Allāh in successive verses.[89]

Of course, a considerable amount of the material just delineated could in principle be spurious, especially where passages display overtly Islamic, and specifically quranic, phraseology. It is therefore appropriate to preface any attempt to mine pre-Islamic poetry for data about Allāh with some remarks on how to recognize the authentic from the specious. It is after all quite conceivable that poetic passages touching on religious matters bear traces of the religious beliefs of their Islamic transmitters and compilers. An interesting illustration of the nature of the problem is provided by two verses from the Muʿallaqa

85. See nn. 34 and 35 above. According to one version, a passage attributed to al-Nābigha, discussed toward the end of §9 below, first refers to Wadd and then employs the term *al-ilāh*. But even here it would be feasible to read *al-ilāh* as meaning Allāh rather than Wadd. Also pertinent is a verse from a poem by ʿAbīd ibn al-Abraṣ, who lived in the first half of the sixth century (Sezgin 1975: 169–71; Jones 1992: 58–59; Weipert 2007). The poem accuses another tribe of having exchanged "their god Yaʿbūb for a [mere] idol" (*wa-tabaddalū l-yaʿbūba baʿda ilāhihim / ṣanaman*; Lyall 1913: 13[A] and 21 = ʿAbīd, no. 2, v. 6). The verse is also cited in *Kitāb al-Aṣnām*, whose entry on Yaʿbūb would seem to be entirely derived from it (al-Kalbī 1914: 63). The line's implicit assumption that Yaʿbūb is *not* a mere idol is so incongruous with later Islamic presuppositions that it must be genuinely pre-Islamic. In any case, its use of *ilāh* in conjunction with a possessive suffix appears to be rare in poetry, certainly in comparison with *rabb* + possessive suffix. Hence, the verse does not necessarily problematize a default identification of *ilāh* preceded by the definite article with Allāh. The verse is exceptional insofar as it would seem to manifest a religious state of affairs in which the primary cultic allegiance of a tribe was to a particular tribal deity specific to it. Although this is how Islamic sources can depict pre-Islamic Arabian religion, this picture is arguably not normally borne out (though perhaps also not directly contradicted) by poetry.

86. See, e.g., Q 84:2, 5, 6, 15, 23; 85:9, 12; 87:1, 7, 10, 15.

87. Thus, a poem ascribed to Zuhayr employs *rabbanā* and Allāh in successive lines, evidently as synonyms (Ahlwardt 1870: 101[A] = Zuhayr, no. 20, vv. 11–12).

88. See, e.g., Q 17:110.

89. See Ḥusayn 1983: 173 (no. 15, vv. 36–37). See also the additional remarks on *al-raḥmān* in §10 of this essay.

of Zuhayr that both Charles C. Torrey and Jawād ʿAlī consider to be pre-quranic evidence for a belief in divine eschatological retribution.[90] They run as follows:

> Do not conceal from Allāh (*fa-lā taktumunna llāha*) what is in your souls / intending it to remain hidden (*li-yakhfā*); whatever is concealed from Allāh he knows (*wa-mahmā yuktami llāha yaʿlamī*).
>
> It is delayed (*yuʾakhkhar*) and entered in a register (*kitāb*) and stored up / for the day of reckoning (*yawm al-ḥisāb*), or it is brought forward (*yuʿajjal*) and avenged.[91]

The phrase *yawm al-ḥisāb* in the second verse is quranic (Q 38:16, 26, 53; 40:27), although by itself this is hardly a smoking gun.[92] But quranic too is the notion of a heavenly register book (*kitāb*) in which everything, including human misdeeds, is recorded (e.g., Q 10:61; 11:6).[93] The same goes for the notion that God might "delay" (*akhkhara*) or "bring forward" (*ʿajjala*) his punishment (e.g., Q 11:8; 18:58). As regards the first verse, the Quran likewise affirms that God knows what humans attempt to conceal (cf. the poem's *wa-mahmā yuktami llāha yaʿlamī* with Q 3:167 and 5:61: *wa-llāhu aʿlamu bi-mā yaktumūn* or *bi-mā kānū yaktumūn*; see also Q 2:33; 21:110; 24:29). It is admittedly not out of the question that Zuhayr could have anticipated aspects of quranic eschatology or, inversely, that quranic phraseology is continuous with earlier Arabic usage, as exemplified by Zuhayr. However, it is equally possible that the notion of a divine register on which God will base an eschatological reckoning is simply a quranicizing accretion to Zuhayr's Muʿallaqa. This suspicion is heightened by the fact that plausibly pre-Islamic Arabic poetry contains very little eschatological material, even if there is at least one prooftext, by al-Aʿshā Maymūn, that would appear to be fairly safe (see below).

The couplet above is therefore too overtly quranic to constitute admissible evidence for Zuhayr's belief in the last judgment, even though it could perhaps be argued that the first verse—whose insistence on Allāh's comprehensive knowledge has further poetic parallels, as we shall see below—is sufficiently connected to the immediately preceding verse in order to count as an integral part of the poem.[94] Yet even if one chooses to accept the

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90. Torrey 1892: 9–10; ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 106.

91. Lyall 1894: 59 (vv. 27–28); Ahlwardt 1870: 95[A] (no. 16, vv. 26–27).

92. As observed in Torrey (1892: 9), the framing of God's eschatological judgment as a "calling to account" is already found in rabbinic texts (see Mishnah Avot 3:1). The notion is also present in the Syriac tradition; see the use of the term *ḥušhbānā* in Beck 1970, 1: 53 (Syriac) and 2: 72–73 (German) = no. 3, ll. 221, 227, 230, 247, 253.

93. Jeffery 1952: 11–12.

94. The previous verse (v. 25, per Ahlwardt) reminds "the confederates"—glossed in Lyall 1894: 59 as consisting of Asad and Ghaṭafān—and the Dhubyān of oaths they have sworn; v. 26 might then function as an admonishment to the addressees to remain true to these unspecified oaths rather than giving in to the evil inclinations hidden in their chests but readily transparent to Allāh. However, it should be noted that the verse following the passage quoted above (v. 28) does not presuppose v. 26. The possibility that the hypothetical addition encompasses both v. 26 and v. 27 therefore remains standing.

first verse's emphasis on Allāh's knowledge (*ʿ-l-m*) of what humans vainly try to conceal (*k-t-m*) from him as a genuinely pre-Islamic notion that also surfaces in the Quran, the second verse at least is under strong suspicion of constituting a later supplement.[95]

In general terms, the methodological principle to abide by is that the more quranic a verse of poetry, the less weight it can sustain as evidence for pre-quranic discourses, at least if the pre-quranic usage of the terms or phrases in question cannot be corroborated by other poetic material.[96] Accordingly, in what follows I generally refrain from quoting such prooftexts. Moreover, I normally avoid relying on poets who are credibly reported to have converted to Islam and to have survived the Prophet by a considerable time, such as Labīd (d. 660 or 661) or al-Khansāʾ (d. after 644?).[97] I do not, however, discount poetry simply because its author is said to have lived into the Islamic period, provided there is no convincing evidence (whether internal or external) that indicates conversion. We can hardly assume that all contemporaries of Muḥammad fell under the immediate sway of quranic notions and language.

Apart from the possibility that poems could have attracted Islamicizing expansions during their early transmission history, it has also been conjectured that later Islamic transmitters may sometimes have dropped or censored pagan content—for instance, by replacing the name of the goddess Allāt with that of Allāh, which would leave meter unaffected.[98] In a similar vein, occurrences of *al-dahr*, designating the destructive and attritional course of time, may on occasion have been replaced by the name Allāh.[99] It is not merely a hypothetical conjecture that the transmitted corpus of early Arabic poetry was affected by such

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95. Brockelmann (1922: 108–9 n. 3) also endorses the position that only the second verse is spurious, albeit without much argument.

96. For some reflections on the implications of this manner of proceeding, see Sinai 2011: 402–3.

97. On Labīd, see Sezgin 1975: 126–27; Brockelmann 1986; Imhof 2004: 59–109. On al-Khansāʾ, see Sezgin 1975: 311–14; Gabrieli 1978; Jones 1992: 89–90. Labīd's *dīwān* includes a significant amount of material that is reminiscent of the Quran or even bears clear traces of quranic diction, even though this is often interwoven with ideas that are pre-Islamic in nature and diverge from quranic teachings; see Montgomery 1997: 239–44, 247–52, 254–57, analyzing ʿAbbās 1962: nos. 24, 7, 26, and 36, respectively (on the latter two, see also Imhof 2004: 62–109). In some of the cases discussed by Montgomery (especially with regard to ʿAbbās 1962: no. 24, whose treatment by Montgomery is partly based on Jones 1992: 80–88), dependence on the Quran is not conclusively certain insofar as Labīd may simply be employing pre-quranic phraseology that is also making itself felt in the Islamic scripture (see in more detail n. 188 below). Matters are far more certain with regard to ʿAbbās 1962: no. 7 (on which, see Montgomery 1997: 247–50), which is unquestionably studded with quranic eschatological diction and motifs; see similarly ʿAbbās 1962: no. 26, vv. 1–3 (Imhof 2004: 89, 93). Since the allegation that Labīd ceased to compose poetry after his conversion to Islam is dubious (Brockelmann 1986: 584), it seems overall apt to say that at least some of his poetry sets a pre-Islamic "gnomic inheritance in an Islamic context" (Montgomery 1997: 252).

98. Nöldeke 1864: x; Lyall 1930: xxvii. Krone (1992) fails to realize that her own skepticism with regard to the hypothesis of extensive expurgation largely agrees with Lyall's position, who is by no means arguing for a "deliberate and systematic" (p. 215) bowdlerization of pagan allusions.

99. On *dahr*, see Caskel 1926: 42–52; Ringgren 1955: 30–46; Tamer 2008 (esp. pp. 54–68); Jamil 2017: 93–114.

targeted terminological substitution, for this is confirmed by extant textual variants. For instance, the statement by al-Khansāʾ *li-l-dahri iḥlāʾun wa-imrārū*, "The course of time brings things sweet and bitter"[100] has a variant in some manuscripts of *Kitāb al-Aghānī* that runs *li-llāhi iḥlāʾun wa-imrārū*.[101] It seems likely that the *li-l-dahri* variant is the original one, especially given that the verse's transmission in the context of al-Khansāʾ's *dīwān* (henceforth, diwan) does not appear to exhibit the *li-llāhi* variant.[102] Thus, at least in this case there was an attempt, whether deliberate or not, to substitute an original reference to *al-dahr* by one to Allāh. In another case, the opening of a verse by al-Nābigha is transmitted in the alternative versions "May my lord preserve you" (*ḥayyāki rabbī*) and "May Wadd preserve you" (*ḥayyāki waddun*).[103] Here too one is inclined to privilege the second variant and assume that in the course of the poem's process of transmission a god other than Allāh was displaced by the latter.

It seems nonetheless improbable that such corrections would have been carried out systematically and across the board: already the fact that we still come across references to deities other than Allāh demonstrates this.[104] In fact, the Islamic tradition is generally very forthcoming with details about the idolatrous customs of pre-Islamic Arabs and can positively relish the cultural alterity of ancient Arabian religion.[105] It is doubtful, therefore, that transmitters of pre-quranic poetry were generally motivated to suppress pagan references. Furthermore, it is far from true that all verses of poetry in which Allāh figures could be turned into statements about Allāt or *al-dahr* simply by replacing a single word; in many cases, the semantics or the grammatical gender of other words in the verse would give rise to difficulties.[106] I therefore share the sense of many other scholars that poetry credibly presented as being pre-quranic may be accepted as such, unless it is possible to put forward a countervailing argument based, for instance, on manifestly quranic or Islamic phraseology or on significant textual uncertainty. However, I also endeavor to heed two additional safety checks that will be detailed further below.

I have tried to take most of my poetry from diwans, i.e., from sources that do not normally harness poetry to theological or exegetical claims and are therefore less likely to prioritize ideological convenience over potential doubts about authenticity. Located at the opposite end of the spectrum of prima facie trustworthiness is the poetry found in the

100. Cheikho 1896: 79 l. 7.

101. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī 1927–74, 15: 81 l. 2 with n. 2. Cf. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 13: 138 l. 13.

102. For another *dahr*-Allāh variant (noted in Wellhausen 1897: 222 n. 2), see Kosegarten 1854: 11 (no. 2, v. 17); Farrāj and Shākir 1963–65: 250.

103. Ahlwardt 1870: 25[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 23, v. 6); Fayṣal 1968: 106 (no. 13, v. 6).

104. Thus also ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 115.

105. Hawting 1999: 88–110.

106. This is also highlighted in ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 115. See, for instance, Geyer 1919: 18–19, 206–12 (v. 61), where an oath with the masculine relative pronoun (implying reference to Allāh) would appear to function as the antecedent of a feminine possessive pronoun. Geyer convincingly argues that the verse originally referred to a female deity, most likely al-ʿUzzā.

sīra, which is covered by a dark cloud of suspicion; in fact, Ibn Isḥāq's uncritical attitude to poetry was already censured by Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī.[107] I have accordingly avoided reliance on literature that adduces poetry in an explicitly religious context, a category of sources that includes not just the *sīra* but also quranic commentaries and *Kitāb al-Aṣnām* by Hishām al-Kalbī (or Ibn al-Kalbī, d. ca. 821).[108] I do not thereby mean to claim that these texts have no value for attempts to reconstruct aspects of pre-quranic Arabian culture and religion, only that it seems preferable to begin by exploring the substantial body of poetic diwans first.

I also use material from anthologies such as the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, and in a few cases from the *Ḥamāsa* collections of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī.[109] It is true that Montgomery has cautioned that "*dīwān*s appear to have been less subject to interference than collections, as the latter were often commissioned or were designed for public consumption."[110] Yet phrases and motifs for which I cite poetry from anthologies are generally confirmed by material drawn from diwans. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī can, in any case, be quite vocal when he suspects misattribution, and he made efforts to verify ascription by checking diwans and by appealing to considerations of style and content.[111] In general, I have worked fairly comprehensively through the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, a number of smaller diwans, such as that of al-Mutalammis,[112] al-Shantamarī's *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn*, and the poetry of Muḥammad's contemporary, al-Aʿshā Maymūn, in the latter two cases gratefully aided by concordances.[113] My citations from other sources are either indebted to earlier scholars or are chance discoveries, making it possible that some further material could still be added to my treatment. It should be noted, however, that I am selective in the verses I quote or reference; thus, there are occurrences of the terms *allāh, al-ilāh*, *rabb*, or *al-raḥmān* in my principal sources that I have decided to omit, either because their authenticity seemed too questionable or because they did not add much to the discussion.

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107. See ʿArafat 1958; ʿArafat 1965; Drory 1996: 44–45.

108. Al-Kalbī 1914; see Hawting 1999: 88–110.

109. On both collections, see Sezgin 1975: 66–73.

110. Montgomery 1997: 258.

111. Kilpatrick 2003: 60–63.

112. Vollers 1903; for an alternative edition with copious apparatus and commentary, see al-Ṣayrafī 1970. On the poet, see Sezgin 1975: 173–75.

113. Namely, Arazi and Masalha 1999 and al-Furayḥ 2001. On al-Aʿshā Maymūn, who probably died in the 620s, see Blachère 1963; Sezgin 1975: 130–32; Jockers 2010. The latter is explicitly skeptical about the assumption of previous scholars that al-Aʿshā was a Christian. But even if he was, this would not entail that his poetry was composed for a predominantly Christian audience. The edition of al-Aʿshā that I quote is Ḥusayn 1983; for an alternative edition, see Geyer 1928. Note that Jockers cautions that "because of the poor state of the *dīwān*'s text, the authenticity of individual poems cannot be convincingly argued or refuted." The fact that some degree of pseudepigraphy is present is indicated by poems nos. 17 and 66 of al-Aʿshā's diwan (Ḥusayn 1983: 184–87, 378–80), which are clearly influenced by the Quran. They can be safely dismissed as inauthentic rather than forming evidence that al-Aʿshā converted, or intended to convert, as is sometimes reported in Islamic sources.

All of the foregoing caveats may well fail to appeal to colleagues of a more skeptical bent. Given that conclusive positive proof in favor of the pre-Islamic authenticity of a given poem or line is more often than not impossible,[114] my effective policy of placing the burden of proof on the scholar arguing for inauthenticity may seem self-serving.[115] There are, however, two additional safety checks that should yield a higher degree of confidence. The first and most important one consists in cumulation. Virtually all of the notions about Allāh that are discussed below—e.g., his role as a creator and as a provider of rain, his frequently destructive involvement in human destinies, and his function as a settler of moral scores—are documented by clusters of poetic verses that do not show obvious phraseological dependence on the Quran (even if they can exhibit a certain degree of affinity with quranic diction that may occasionally raise the question where, precisely, one is to draw the boundary between suspicious dependence and innocent affinity). Thus, even if doubts could be raised about this or that single prooftext, they do not imperil the likely pre-quranic status of the general idea under consideration. Take, for instance, the fact, documented below, that a handful of verses feature Allāh as the subject of the verb *jazā* ("to requite") or similar terms implying divine retribution for moral infractions. I submit that it is improbable that all of these prooftexts are later fabrications or, in other words, that the very convention of concatenating Allāh and the root *j-z-y* only emerged among post-quranic transmitters who were engaged in the process of padding earlier poetry with verses of their own making.[116] It is primarily due to an interest in cumulation that much of the following moves through bundles of verses without paying more than peripheral attention to how they sit within their context.[117]

A second safety check is triangulation with the Quran, to wit: if beliefs about Allāh that are expressed in poetry align with views that the Quran ascribes to its pagan opponents, we can at least be confident that the poetic verses are voicing ideas that are non-anachronistic in a pre-Islamic context (assuming that we are prepared to consider the Quran a largely faithful transcript of Muḥammad's preaching). It is important to underscore that I am not proposing to triangulate poetry with the Quran's *own* teachings, but rather with the Quran's polemical presentation of its opponents. The former approach exposes itself to the

114. Wagner 1987: 25–27.

115. This latter approach is explicitly adopted, for instance, in Ringgren 1955: 62.

116. It is, of course, true that the Quran contains many verses in which Allāh figures as the agent of *jazā*, and it could be objected that transmitters-cum-composers of ostensibly ancient poetry may have picked up the formulaic convention at hand from the Quran and then gone on to produce the entire range of prooftexts I cite. This conjecture would be most naturally at home in a scenario according to which the poems that are presented to us as having originated in the pre-Islamic period are the end products of a process of continuous and organic expansion and revision over the entire course of their early transmission history, such that no distinction between an original core and secondary interpolations is feasible. Despite the undoubted reality of textual uncertainties, interpolations, editorial reordering, and misattribution, I find such a scenario of continuous transmission-cum-composition more radical than warranted.

117. For a similar methodology, see Webb 2016: 69–70.

complaint that any correspondences between poetic statements about Allāh and quranic doctrine are simply indications that the poetry in question is dependent on the Quran and therefore spurious. However, the possibility that transmitters of early poetry reworked their material in line with the quranic portrayal of the Associators, which does not always agree with post-quranic imaginations of pre-Islamic paganism, is much more remote.[118] As will emerge from §§6–9, much of the poetic evidence for pre-quranic beliefs about Allāh meets this criterion of triangulation via quranic polemics: poetry supplies us with glimpses of an understanding of Allāh that generally matches or credibly complements that held by the quranic Associators, except for a limited number of aspects that will be duly pointed out.

118. For instance, while figures like Ḥammād al-Rāwiya (on whom, see Fück 1971) were sometimes accused of forgery (Jones 1996: 14–16; Drory 1996: 39–42, 46–48), a desire to make the poetic corpus cohere with what the Quran says were the beliefs and practices of Muḥammad's pagan opponents does not figure as a point of criticism in such accounts. Nor are there less direct indications that this might have been a motive for forgery. For the sake of intellectual honesty, I should add that the argument from triangulation would undoubtedly be strongest if pre-Islamic poetry consistently aligned with views that the Quran attributes to its pagan opponents yet that are not shared by the Quran itself. However, this is patently not the case for most of the ideas discussed below, such as general assertions of Allāh's supremacy and his status as a creator, etc., to which the Quran itself is just as committed as its associating opponents. Should we therefore view the doctrinal overlap with the views attributed to the Associators as potentially coincidental in such cases and instead deem the overlap with the Quran's own theology to be primary? That is, should we envisage a scenario according to which early Islamic transmitters of poetry, inspired by quranic teachings, fabricated poetic material presenting Allāh as a supreme deity exercising untrammeled dominion over nature and over human fates, material that then accidentally happened to agree with ideas shared by the quranic Associators? One reason why this seems unlikely is that we would in this case expect poetry to show a much more intimate and frequent entwinement between ideas shared by the Quran and the Associators, on the one hand, and ideas that are specific to the Quran yet contested by the Associators, on the other, such as the exclusive divinity of Allāh, the reality of an eschatological judgment, and the prophetic status of Muḥammad. However, as will emerge in more detail below, there is a large amount of poetry whose statements about Allāh are conspicuously limited to doctrines also endorsed by the Associators. This is especially notable in view of the fact that many quranic passages attempt to derive the nonexistence of other deities than Allāh or the reality of an eschatological resurrection and judgment from doctrines conceded by the Associators (see, e.g., Sinai 2017a: 169–74). Were poetic statements of Allāh's supremacy and control over nature and human destinies dependent on the Quran, we would have expected this argumentative link, which is integral to much of the Quran, to be reflected by the poetry at hand.

6. Allāh as Creator and Provider of Rain

To begin my survey of what poetry has to say about Allāh, there is a limited number of verses that indicate belief in a creator deity even on the part of apparently pagan poets, in line with such quranic quotations of the Associators' views as Q 29:61 (Allāh as creator of the heavens and the earth) and 43:87 (Allāh as creator of humans):

1. The opening piece of Abū Tammām's *Ḥamāsa*, ascribed to one Qurayṭ ibn Unayf, makes explicit mention of the creation of humans by a divine lord, similar to what the quranic opponents concede in Q 43:87: "It is as if your lord created no one else but you among all of mankind in order to be afraid of him" (*ka-anna rabbaka lam yakhluq li-khashyatihī / siwāhumū min jamīʿi l-nāsi insānā*), the poet mocks his own tribe.[119]
2. A later piece from Abū Tammām's *Ḥamāsa*, attributed to one Bāʿith ibn Ṣuraym, contains an oath by the one "who raised the heaven in its place and the full moon" (*man samaka l-samāʾ makānahā / wa-l-badra*).[120]
3. Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm, a Medinese poet reported to have been killed in 620, says in a description of his beloved: "Allāh ordained for her (*qaḍā lahă llāhu*), when the creator created her (*ḥīna yakhluquhă l-/khāliqu*), that the twilight would not conceal her," due to the whiteness of her skin.[121]
4. Al-Aʿshā caps off a description of the martial prowess of his patron—said to be Qays ibn Maʿdīkarib, a tribal leader of Kinda who would appear to have been Jewish[122]—with the following line: "And you know that the soul will meet its death in whatever manner its creator, the king, has ordained for it" (*wa-ʿalimta anna l-nafsa talqā ḥatfahā / mā kāna khāliquhă l-malīku qaḍā lahā*).[123]

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119. Al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī 2000: 21 (no. 1, v. 7; see Brockelmann 1922: 105; Zaytūnī 1987: 241–42; the first five verses are translated in Hoyland 2001: 113). The reported author is an obscure figure, although generally assumed to be pre-Islamic; see al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī 2000: 14 (with n. 1).

120. Al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī 2000: 384 (no. 176, v. 3; see Brockelmann 1922: 105; Izutsu 1964: 1222; Zaytūnī 1987: 240). For some background on Bāʿith ibn Ṣuraym, see al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī 2000: 386 (making him a contemporary of the sixth-century Lakhmid ruler ʿAmr ibn Hind). The creation of the heavens by Allāh is a frequent quranic trope (e.g., Q 2:22; 71:15), but the verb *samaka* is not used in this context (although the root *s-m-k* appears in the noun *samk* at Q 79:28).

121. Kowalski 1914: 17[A] and 33 (no. 5, v. 6). A variant has *ṣawwarahā* instead of *yakhluquhā* (Kowalski 1914: 36; Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 2: 168 l. 4 from bottom). Kowalski wonders whether the verse implies a distinction between Allāh and "the creator" (Kowalski 1914: 40), but this seems highly unlikely. Without the participle *al-khāliq*, the verse would obviously be metrically incomplete, meaning that the presence of a seemingly redundant expression should not be pressed.

122. Lecker 1995: 639–42.

123. Ḥusayn 1983: 83 (no. 3, v. 54); see Zaytūnī 1987: 241; Ringgren 1955: 79.

5. A lengthy poem about the creation of the world by Allāh, including a detailed description of the heavens and of God's throne, is preserved under the name of Umayya ibn Abī l-Ṣalt and has been accepted as authentic by most scholars who have examined it, on the grounds that it constitutes a highly idiosyncratic and, in many respects, obscure adaptation of a wide range of cosmological and angelological traditions that are conspicuously independent of the Quran.[124]

Even leaving out further data that are either more ambiguous or may in fact be post-Islamic,[125] the poetic record accordingly indicates an endorsement, or minimally a casual acceptance, of the idea of divine creation—both of the cosmos as a whole and of humans in particular—on the part of at least some pagan poets. Not all of the foregoing passages explicitly mention Allāh, but there is hardly any other plausible contender for the role of a creator deity, especially in view of those verses that do name him (e.g., Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm). It is, of course, not surprising that the notion of a creator deity should be present in a poem attributed to the Christian ʿAdī ibn Zayd, who speaks of "the god of creation" (*ilāh al-khalq*), identified as Allāh in a later verse.[126]

Especially the first and third prooftexts above suggest that Allāh's creative activity is not confined to the primordial past: Allāh, it appears, is understood to have created contemporary human individuals, not just the human race as such or its ultimate ancestor. What this means is perhaps that the gestation of humans in the maternal womb and their ensuing growth and maturation is considered to be an instance of divine creation. This perspective, according to which seemingly autonomous natural processes coincide with divine actions,

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124. Schulthess 1911: 25–30, 84–89 (no. 25); see Schulthess 1906: 83–86, 88; Hirschberg 1939: 41–47, 79–82, 85–92, 96–98; Seidensticker 2011: 47–49.

125. Brockelmann also cites a verse in which the speaker swears by the one to whom (*lahū*) he credits (the creation of?) the "blood-bearing [vein]" that runs underneath his hand (al-Buḥturī 1910: 26 l. 4; see Brockelmann 1922: 105–6). Brockelmann furthermore adduces a verse by al-Khansāʾ praising the consummate shape in which "the Merciful created" her brother (*ka-annama khalaqa l-raḥmānu ṣūratahū / dīnāra ʿaynin yarāhu l-nāsu manqūdā*; Cheikho 1896: 65 l. 3). As pointed out above, al-Khansāʾ's reported conversion to Islam complicates any reliance on her poetry in documenting pre-quranic notions. In fact, despite Brockelmann's efforts to argue that the use of the divine name *al-raḥmān* should not be deemed to make this prooftext suspect, the fact that the next verse goes on to implore God to reward her brother with paradise and to grant him immortality ("May Allāh recompense you with his garden on our behalf, and may you be granted immortality in paradise") makes the passage difficult to use for our purposes. Izutsu adduces another two verses, attributed to ʿAntara, but these are absent from the recension of the latter's poems by al-Shantamarī and should perhaps be treated with caution (Izutsu 1964: 121). The extent of the material circulating under the name of ʿAntara that is not found in the recension of al-Shantamarī can be gauged by comparing the twenty-seven pieces contained in Ahlwardt 1870 (33–52^{A}) with the 164 items included in Ṭirād 1992. The two verses quoted by Izutsu are found in Ṭirād 1992: 51 (no. 35, v. 5), 115 (no. 104, v. 7). For a comparative study and edition of the two main recensions of ʿAntara's diwan (one encompassing twenty-seven poems, the other encompassing forty), see Montgomery 2018.

126. Dmitriev 2010: 353, 366, 373; al-Muʿaybid 1965: 158–60 (no. 103, vv. 2, 10, 14). Verse 6 of this poem (according to al-Muʿaybid's verse numbering) is already cited in Andrae 1926: 44.

also marks the Quran's own theology,[127] but it is shared by the Quran's opponents, who agree with the Quran that the falling of rain is due to Allāh (Q 29:63: "And when you ask them, 'Who sends down water from the sky and enlivens the earth by it after it has died?,' they will say, 'Allāh'"). We saw above that Safaitic invocations also implore Allāh to grant rain. In poetry, too, Allāh is entreated to send rain or is credited with having done so.[128] Relevant evidence includes the following three passages:

1. Al-Nābigha asks Allāh to grant spring rains to his patron al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir III of al-Ḥīra.[129]
2. A poem attributed to Aws ibn Ḥajar speaks of Allāh as having "sent a rain cloud" (*arsala muznatan*).[130]
3. The Hudhalī al-Burayq entreats "the Merciful" (*al-raḥmān*) to "irrigate" (*saqā*) the grave of his brother.[131]

It is true that the verbs *saqā* or *asqā* with Allāh as the subject also occur in the Quran, sometimes specifically in connection with rain.[132] The standard quranic way of crediting God with rain, however, is by means of the verbs *nazzala* and *anzala*,[133] while *saqā* and *asqā* are more often employed in eschatological contexts (Q 14:16; 47:15; 76:17, 21; 83:25; 88:5).

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127. Sinai 2017a: 173–74.

128. Brockelmann 1922: 106–8.

129. Ahlwardt 1870: 12^{A} (al-Nābigha, no. 8, v. 18; also cited in Zaytūnī 1987: 189, 225).

130. Geyer 1892: 49 and 11^{A} (no. 17, v. 1; also cited in Zaytūnī 1987: 189). On Aws (especially on his links to al-Ḥīra and the question whether he might have adopted Christianity), see Geyer 1892: 2–8; Ringgren 1955: 71–72; Sezgin 1975: 171–72.

131. Wellhausen 1884: 126 and 20^{A} (no. 165, v. 6; the reference in Brockelmann 1922: 106 is to be emended accordingly); Farrāj and Shākir 1963–65: 742. On the diwan of Hudhayl, see Miller 2016; Dmitriev 2017. Al-Burayq would appear to have been a contemporary of Muḥammad (Hell 1932: 82, 86–87; Sezgin 1975: 263–64). Wellhausen (1884: 126) considers the use of *al-raḥmān* here to be due to an Islamic "correction," while the significance of the verse is also dismissed on account of the poet's having lived into the Islamic period (Nöldeke et al. 1909–38, 1: 112 n. 1); yet Brockelmann (1922: 106, cf. also Hell 1932: 91 n. 1) rejects this view by pointing to other poetic occurrences of *al-raḥmān* that are attributed to pagan authors (one of which, by Salāma ibn Jandal, is quoted further below). Additional verses, including one attributed to al-Shanfarā, are cited in Zaytūnī 1987: 207–9. For two other verses combining *saqā* with Allāh, see Zaytūnī 1987: 225 and the anonymous piece of poetry that Yāqūt cites about Dayr al-Lujj in al-Ḥīra (said to have been built by al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir) in Wüstenfeld 1867: 691. See also Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 13: 7 l. 3 from bottom (*saqā llāhu aṭlālan* "May Allāh irrigate ruins"). Georges Tamer (2008: 73 n. 208) maintains that there is "no evidence at all in pre-Islamic poetry" that Allāh was credited with providing rain, but this requires qualification in view of the passages adduced above.

132. Thus, at Q 26:79 Abraham describes Allāh as "the one who gives me food and drink" (*al-ladhī huwa yuṭʿimunī wa-yasqīn*). The passive *yusqā*, perhaps from *suqiya*, is employed in Q 13:4 for the watering of vineyards, palms, and tilled land. The provider of water here is clearly assumed to be Allāh. Other verses that refer to rain unambiguously have *asqā* (Q 15:22; 25:49; 77:27).

133. Q 2:22; 6:99; 8:11; 13:17; 14:32; 15:22; 16:10, 65; etc. Note that Q 15:22 combines *anzala* and *asqā*.

Allāh's power over nature extends as far as the seemingly impregnable and imperishable mountains: if they were to disobey him (*ʿaṣaynahū*), he would lead them by a rope, says al-Muthaqqib.[134] A verse attributed to ʿUrwa ibn al-Ward (although not found in Ibn al-Sikkīt's recension of his poetry) admonishes its addressee to "travel in Allāh's lands (*bilād*) and search for riches"; here, the earth as a whole is placed under Allāh's control,[135] just as the quranic Associators are portrayed as conceding that Allāh exercises "dominion" (*malakūt*) over everything (Q 23:84–89). The poetic understanding of Allāh, then, is categorically not that of a quasi-deistic god who, after creating the world, has retired from all activity, a *deus otiosus*, as he has sometimes been characterized.[136] Much more so than with the primordial past, the poets associate Allāh with control over present goings-on.

134. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 308, 2:106 (no. 28, v. 16; also cited in Zaytūnī 1987: 231). On al-Muthaqqib, see Sezgin 1975: 188–89. Brockelmann (1922: 107) also quotes a passage from a poem attributed to al-Nābigha, which maintains that the sea "belongs to" him (*lahū*). Brockelmann assumes this statement to refer to Allāh, who appears in the immediately preceding verse (Ahlwardt 1870: 21^{A} = no. 19, vv. 17–18). However, in al-Ḥittī 1991: 147–48 the antecedent of *lahū* is taken to be not Allāh but rather al-Nābigha's patron. That is conceivable, given that "he" is then said to "repel" seaborne attackers from fortresses adjoining the sea and is described as a generous provider (*wahūb*) of well-trained and swift camels. It is true that prior to the verse under consideration, the poet's patron figures in the second person, but switching between the second and third person is not only common in the Quran but also occurs in poetry; see, e.g., the shift from second to third person between vv. 1 and 4 in Vollers 1903: 23–24, 65 (no. 2), or the shift from the third to the second person in Ahlwardt 1870: 45^{A} (ʿAntara, no. 21, v. 9; the shift is highlighted in Ṭirād 1992: 152). The evidential value of the passage thus remains inconclusive. On Allāh's dominion over the sea, cf. Q 16:14 and 45:12.

135. Nöldeke 1863: 51, 88 (no. 32, v. 4; also quoted in ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 106; Zaytūnī 1987: 231). On ʿUrwa, see Sezgin 1975: 141–42.

136. See Berkey 2003: 42 and Crone 2016: 77–79 for further references; see also Dost 2017: 55. The same is true for the Quran's own theology as well; see Sinai 2017a: 173–74.

7. Allāh as the Master of Human Destinies

Besides his dominion over the natural word, Allāh is frequently presented as holding sway over the destiny of human individuals and collectives. In many cases, this has a benevolent dimension. The notion can take a markedly formulaic turn. Thus, pre-Islamic poets can employ the exclamation *bi-ḥamdi llāhi* in order to praise Allāh for their ability to "maintain intimate connections and sever them" (*fa-innī bi-ḥamdi llāhi waṣṣālun ṣarūmū*)[137] or to "redeem plundered herds and captives."[138] A similar use of *bi-ḥamdi llāhi* occurs in a brief piece ascribed to the Hudhalī poet Abū Jundab,[139] while al-Nābigha reminds a tribe that they have been "protected" (*wuqīti*) against a Ghassānid attack *bi-ḥamdi llāhi* and counsels them to seek refuge in the mountains.[140] The corpus of al-Aʿshā has both *bi-ḥamdi llāhi* and *bi-ḥamdi l-ilāhi*.[141] A self-standing couplet from the diwan of Imruʾ al-Qays employs *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi*, as does a verse by Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm that hails Allāh for the defeat of an enemy tribe.[142] Although *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi* is obviously in line with conventional Islamic phraseology, the parallels just catalogued provide reassurance that this latter wording does not as such suggest pseudepigraphy. Rather, it seems perfectly plausible that all three variants were in poetic use depending on the specific metrical environment at hand.[143]

The fact that the effectiveness of human or animal endeavors depends, if not on divine assistance, then at least on the absence of divine let or hindrance is also signaled by the phrases "by Allāh's permission" (*bi-idhni llāhi*) and "if Allāh wills" (*in shāʾa llāhu*), which despite their prominence in quranic and Islamic discourse are already credibly attested in pre-Islamic poetry.[144] In what seems like a metrically motivated variant of *bi-idhni llāhi*,

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137. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 40, 2: 12 (no. 6, v. 2; Salama ibn al-Khurshub; see Sezgin 1975; 215).

138. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 703, 2: 296 (no. 105, v. 22; Muʿāwiya ibn Mālik; see Sezgin 1975: 184–85).

139. Kosegarten 1854: 86 (no. 36, v. 1; cited in Hell 1932: 90); Farrāj and Shākir 1963–65: 354. Abū Jundab appears to have been a contemporary of Muḥammad, but Joseph Hell rules out that he ever converted to Islam (Hell 1932: 82, 90; see also Sezgin 1975: 258). Nathaniel Miller (2016: 183) also inclines to the view that the verse probably "reflects a genuine pre-Islamic sentiment."

140. Ahlwardt 1870: 4[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 2, v. 11).

141. Ḥusayn 1983: 225 (no. 23, v. 13), 69 (no. 2, v. 33), respectively.

142. Ahlwardt 1870: 124[A] (Imruʾ al-Qays, no. 15, v. 1; also quoted in ʿAlī 1968–73: 6: 109); Kowalski 1914: 31[A] and 62 (no. 13, v. 12).

143. For further comments on *bi-ḥamdi llāhi*, etc., see §10 below.

144. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 235, 2: 80 (no. 22, v. 14; also quoted in Brockelmann 1922: 111; Zaytūnī 1987: 208; see also Qabāwa 1987: 107–8); Lyall 1918–24, 1: 307, 2: 106 (no. 28, v. 13; also quoted in Zaytūnī 1987: 233). Brockelmann (1922: 111) cites another occurrence that can be found in al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī 2000: 320. See also the use of the counterfactual *law shāʾa rabbī* "had my lord willed," in Ahlwardt 1870: 58[A] (Ṭarafa, no. 4, v. 80; also cited in Zaytūnī 1987: 233). For quranic instances of

al-Nābigha describes his camel's journeying toward his patron as occurring "by the leave of its Lord" (*bi-ʿidhrati rabbihā*).[145] The theme of Allāh's bestowal of favors on humans also underlies the formula *li-llāhi darru* X, "To God be attributed the good that has proceeded from X" (where X may be a person or an action).[146]

Evocations of divine favor and grace are not, however, confined to brief formulae and can occur in a more explicitly developed shape, at the hand of a comparatively wide range of poets:

1. ʿĀmir ibn al-Ṭufayl, incidentally reputed to be an implacable enemy of Muḥammad, credits Allāh with a successful raid against the Hamdān (*li-llāhi ghāratunā*), even though Allāh had deflected them from their original target: "We set out for the Banū Nahd and their brothers, Jarm, but Allāh intended [us to raid] Hamdān."[147]
2. A passage from the diwan of Hudhayl, attributed to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, describes someone who escaped being attacked by the speaker as having received the grace of "the god" (*manna l-ilāhu ʿalayka*).[148]
3. It is God who grants and withholds resources, asserts ʿAbd Qays ibn Khufāf: "Be self-sufficient as long as your lord endows you with self-sufficiency" (*wa-staghni mā aghnāka rabbuka bi-l-ghinā*).[149]
4. A verse from the corpus of al-Aʿshā invokes the help that "the god" has given to his patron against the latter's enemies (*wajadta l-ilāha ʿalayhim qadīrā*), deploying an adjective (*qadīr*, "powerful, mighty") that is also prominent in the Quran, although not distinctive enough in order to suggest quranic influence.[150] Elsewhere al-Aʿshā appeals to the Bakr ibn Wāʾil to ally themselves with Qays ibn Maʿdīkarib by say-

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bi-idhni llāh or *bi-idhn* + suffix see, e.g., Q 3:152, 166; 4: 64; or 5:16, 100; for *in shāʾa* used of Allāh, see Q 6:41; 9:28; 12:99.

145. Ahlwardt 1870: 21[A] (no. 19, v. 10).

146. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 458, 2: 169 (no. 45, v. 4; Muraqqish al-Akbar); Lyall 1918–24, 1: 525, 2: 203 (no. 66, v. 7; Ufnūn, on whom, see Sezgin 1975: 150–51); Vollers 1903: 39, 69 (no. 7, v. 1; al-Mutalammis); Kowalski 1914: 44[A] and 83 (frag. 12, v. 6; Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm). See also Lane 1984, 1: 863b–c. For the variant *li-llāhi* X, see Lyall 1918–24, 1: 606, 2: 242 (no. 82, v. 9; Murra ibn Hammām; see Sezgin 1975: 159); and the verse by ʿĀmir ibn al-Ṭufayl quoted next in the main text.

147. Lyall 1913: 150–51[A] and 119–20 (no. 37, vv. 1, 6; the latter verse is also cited in Zaytūnī 1987: 232; note that Lyall does not render the poem's opening *li-llāhi*). On ʿĀmir ibn al-Ṭufayl, see Sezgin 1975: 244–45.

148. Wellhausen 1884: 151 and 46[A] (no. 210, v. 3); Farrāj and Shākir 1963–65: 845. Hell (1932: 89) denies that this passage is authentically pre-Islamic, but does not present a corroborating argument. On my presumption that *al-ilāh* in poetic usage can generally be identified with Allāh, see above. On Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, see Sezgin 1975: 137–39.

149. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 752, 2: 323 (no. 116, v. 14). On ʿAbd Qays, see Sezgin 1975: 183–84. Cf. the use of the same verb *istaghnā* at Q 80:5, 92:8, and 96:7, in the slightly different sense of deeming oneself to be self-sufficient (Ambros 2004: 204). For another verse assuming Allāh's control over human destinies, see Lyall 1918–24, 1: 492, 2: 183 (no. 54, v. 33; attributed to Muraqqish al-Akbar): "May Allāh not remove [from us] (*lā yubʿidi llāhu*) girding [with weapons] and raids."

150. Ḥusayn 1983: 147 (no. 12, v. 43). Cf. Q 2:20, 106, 109, 148, etc.

ing that "the god has endowed you with him" (*fa-inna l-ilāhu ḥabākum bihī*).[151] Possibly with regard to the same patron, he proclaims that "my lord" (*rabbī*) has granted him power and generosity and that "the god has elevated him above every tribe" (*namāhu l-ilāhu fawqa kulli qabīlatin*).[152] Speaking with reference to his own tribe, he maintains that "the god has made our nourishment consist in our [animal] possessions, as a guaranteed provision (*rizq*) that will not be depleted."[153]

5. An even higher number of references to Allāh's benevolent involvement with individual and collective fortunes than in the diwan of al-Aʿshā is found in the poetic corpus of al-Nābigha, in some cases as part of panegyrics composed for a courtly context in which Christianity had a significant presence.[154] It is to Allāh that one may ascribe one's prosperity,[155] and it is Allāh who is credited with having equipped the tribe of Ghassān with a generous disposition[156] and to have given al-Nuʿmān III of al-Ḥīra "an exalted rank (*sūratan*) before which you see every king quiver."[157] Elsewhere al-Nābigha beseeches Allāh to grant al-Nuʿmān's perpetual survival (*nasʾalu llāha khuldahū*)[158] and to render him victorious over all of creation (*wa-kāna lahū ʿală l-bariyyati nāṣirā*).[159] In yet another composition, al-Nābigha presents Solomon as a model of kingship held up to al-Nuʿmān, claiming that it was "the god" (*al-ilāh*) who gave Solomon authority over his creatures (*al-bariyya*) and who charged him to subdue the jinn.[160]

Despite such instances of divinely granted flourishing, however, Allāh's impact on the human sphere can also be portrayed as destructive and threatening, or at least as apt to

151. Ḥusayn 1983: 99 (no. 5, v. 34). On Qays ibn Maʿdīkarib, see n. 122 above.

152. Ḥusayn 1983: 347 (no. 55, vv. 30–31).

153. Ḥusayn 1983: 281 (no. 34, v. 35).

154. See already Andrae 1926: 42–43.

155. Ahlwardt 1870: 17[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 15, v. 12): *fa-lamma raʾā an thammara llāhu mālahū* ("and when he saw that Allāh had granted him abundant possessions"). I owe the reference to Wellhausen 1897: 222 n. 3. Note that there is no quranic parallel for this use of *thammara* with Allāh as the subject. The text belongs to the group of poems whose authenticity was disputed by al-Aṣmaʿī (Ahlwardt 1870: 111), but I am not convinced that there is a compelling reason to assume that it is influenced by quranic or Islamic notions.

156. Ahlwardt 1870: 3[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 1, v. 23); see Brockelmann 1922: 112.

157. Ahlwardt 1870: 5[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 3, v. 9; see Arberry 1965: 34–35; also cited in Zaytūnī 1987: 223).

158. Ahlwardt 1870: 11[A] (no. 8, v. 5; also quoted in Zaytūnī 1987: 224).

159. Ahlwardt 1870: 12[A] (no. 8, v. 20); cf. Izutsu 1964: 110. For another blessing invoking Allāh that is ascribed to a Qurashī contemporary of Muḥammad by the name of Maqqās al-ʿĀʾidhī, see Lyall 1918–24, 1: 608–9, 2: 244 (no. 84, v. 3), in praise of Shaʿbān: "When calamities bring down the stature of a people, may Allāh raise your stature even more (*fa-zāda llāhu ālakumu rtifāʿā*)!" The verse is also quoted in Zaytūnī 1987: 224; on the poet, see Sezgin 1975: 165.

160. Ahlwardt 1870: 7[A] (no. 5, vv. 22–26); see Stetkevych 2017: 4–14. Note the poet's employment of the term *bariyya*, as in the previous poem cited.

disrupt human planning and wishes. This is the case in the following four examples, which present Allāh as an inscrutable menace permanently hanging above one's head:

1. Salāma ibn Jandal declares, "What the Merciful wishes, he ties and loosens" (*wa-mā yashaʾi l-raḥmānu yaʿqid wa-yuṭliqī*); he then goes on to call him "the bone-breaker" (*al-kāsiru l-ʿaẓma*) who "gathers and disperses what he wishes" (*wa-mā yashaʾ / mina l-amri yajmaʿ baynahū wa-yufarriqī*) and to single him out as the one who caused al-Nuʿmān III to enter (*al-mudkhilu l-nuʿmāna*) the prison of the Sasanian king Khusraw II.[161]
2. A brief poem from the corpus of ʿAntara admonishes its addressee to be grateful for the favor that the poet has shown him by sparing him in battle (*fa-lā takfuri l-nuʿmā*); he then utters the ominous warning, "Do not feel safe from what Allāh may cause to occur tomorrow" (*wa-lā taʾmanan mā yuḥdithu llāhu fī ghadī*).[162]
3. The same sentiment is expressed by a line from the Muʿallaqa of al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza, referring to an attack on the poet's tribe: "Allāh's command will attain [its intended object], bringing the wretched to wretchedness" (*wa-amru llā-/-hi balghun yashqā bihī l-ashqiyāʾū*).[163]
4. The concluding verse of a brief piece in the diwan of Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm declares that "man loves to obtain the things he desires, but Allāh only does what he wishes" (*wa-yaʾbā llāhu illā mā yashāʾū*).[164]

A particularly captivating view of Allāh's destructive involvement with human destinies is afforded by an elegy from the diwan of Zuhayr that lists Tubbaʿ, Luqmān ibn ʿĀd, Dhū l-Qarnayn (Alexander the Great), Pharaoh, and the Negus (*al-najāshī*) as having been destroyed (*ahlaka*) by Allāh.[165] The passage is to some degree reminiscent of quranic narratives about Allāh's punishment of earlier communities, and the triple use of the verb *ahlaka* with Allāh as the grammatical subject certainly recalls quranic statements to the effect that God "destroyed" (*ahlaka*) prior generations or settlements (e.g., Q 6:6; 7:4; 10:13;

161. Qabāwa 1987: 182–84. Parts of this passage are also quoted in Brockelmann 1922: 106; Zaytūnī 1987: 207.

162. Ahlwardt 1870: 37[A] (ʿAntara, no. 8, v. 3).

163. Lyall 1894: 138 (v. 62; cf. Arberry 1957: 225). On al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza, see Sezgin 1975: 129–30. For my modification of Arberry's translation, suggested by Geert Jan van Gelder, see Lane 1984, 1: 252b. My understanding of the verse agrees with Caskel 1926: 54, whereas ʿAlī (1968–73, 6: 106, 111) reads the line as asserting divine punishment of sinners, i.e., he understands "the wretched ones" (*al-ashqiyāʾ*) to be wretched by virtue of having committed moral transgressions rather than simply by virtue of falling victim to Allāh's inscrutable command. Yet this is not how the verb *shaqiya* is used in Ahlwardt 1870: 8[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 5, v. 40), where it clearly designates that the poet is in a state of objective suffering due to his slanderers, whose claims are likened to a "blow to the liver," rather than in a state of specifically moral deficiency. Moreover, an implied accusation of immorality would be contextually inappropriate in the case of the Muʿallaqa of al-Ḥārith.

164. Kowalski 1914: 28[A] and 56 (no. 11, v. 8).

165. Ahlwardt 1870: 101[A] (Zuhayr, no. 20, vv. 12–13).

11:117; 50:36).[166] But the theme of the destruction of settlements is already attested in the poetry of al-Mutalammis,[167] and similar catalogues of past individuals and collectives, now obliterated despite their former glory, also occur in poetry that is credibly attributed to al-Aʿshā, ʿAdī ibn Zayd, and ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa, sometimes (but by no means invariably) featuring names familiar from the Quran (Iram, ʿĀd, Thamūd).[168] Moreover, there is at least one other case apart from the panegyric by Zuhayr—namely, a poem by al-Aʿshā—in which such a catalogue incorporates a reference to Allāh (here glossed as "his lord") as being the agent of death and destruction.[169] Most likely, then, the quranic punishment legends rework a more ancient trope, exemplified by the Zuhayr passage.[170] It may also be noted that the Quran depicts both Luqmān and Dhū l-Qarnayn as emphatically positive figures who would as such hardly merit divine obliteration (see Q 31 and 18:83–99). This discrepancy increases one's confidence that the Zuhayr poem is not a secondary versification of aspects of quranic narrative,[171] even if its authorship was not uncontested in the premodern period.[172]

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166. On quranic punishment legends, see Sinai 2017a: 169–72.

167. Vollers 1903: 35, 68 (no. 5, v. 7), mentioning how a fortress resisted Tubbaʿ *ayyāma uhlikati l-qurā*, "in the days when the settlements were destroyed." Cf. in particular Q 7:4 (*wa-kam min qaryatin ahlaknāhā*) and 28:58 (*wa-kam ahlaknā min qaryatin baṭirat maʿīshatahā*). But the poem by al-Mutalammis does not explicitly suggest a divine agent of punishment.

168. See Ḥusayn 1983: 267, 269 (no. 33, vv. 5–18), 331 (no. 53, vv. 1–12); al-Muʿaybid 1965: 87–89 (no. 16, vv. 22–30; cf. Andrae 1926: 46), 122 (no. 39, vv. 1–2; cf. Andrae 1926: 46–47), 170 (no. 119); note that the latter two pieces are not part of the diwan proper but have been extracted by the editor from other literary sources. See also the piece by ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa that is quoted in al-Buḥturī's *Ḥamāsa* (al-Buḥturī 1910: 122; Lyall 1919: 64 = frag. 3). Becker 1916 emphasizes the Christian background of the underlying *ubi sunt* motif. See also Andrae 1926: 45–48.

169. Ḥusayn 1983: 267 (no. 33, v. 12); by contrast, at p. 331 (no. 53, v. 3) it is the "fates of death" (*manāyā*) who are identified as the agent of destruction. On the relationship of Allāh and fate, see below.

170. One may be tempted to subsume this adaption under the category of a "theologization of Arabic lore" that is suggested as a general descriptor of the Quran's relationship to poetry in El Masri 2016: 256–58. But since Allāh has a clear presence in at least some poetic catalogues of devastated peoples and individuals, the latter are by no means devoid of theological implications. More generally, of course, there can be no doubt that the Quran is much more systematically and persistently preoccupied with the enunciation of doctrine than the entirety of pre-Islamic poetry (Sinai 2011: 413–14).

171. A similar observation can be made with regard to the preceding two verses (vv. 10–11) of Zuhayr, no. 20; see n. 175 below. This is, however, not to say that we may safely assume that all poetry by post-quranic Islamic authors conformed to quranic doctrine.

172. According to al-Shantamarī, al-Aṣmaʿī rejected the poem's attribution to Zuhayr, and he reports that some suggested that it was composed by an *anṣārī* called Ṣirma (Ahlwardt 1870: 111; Qabāwa 1980: 167). Ibn Hishām introduces the latter as an older contemporary of the Prophet who produced poetry praising God during the Jāhiliyya and converted to Islam as an old man; see Wüstenfeld 1858–60, 1: 348–51 (Guillaume 1955: 236–39); Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr 2006, 1: 442–43; Hirschberg 1939: 39–40; Sezgin 1975: 294. Ṣirma also figures in a *sabab al-nuzūl* narrative in al-Thaʿlabī (2015, 2: 546 = *ad* Q 2:187), although there is some confusion about his name.

Prima facie, it may seem that Zuhayr understands Allāh's destructive activity to be retributive in character. After all, Pharaoh is labeled a "tyrant" (*jabbār*) who exceeded his bounds (*ṭaghā*);[173] and as we shall see below, Allāh was certainly held to mete out this-worldly reward and punishment. Moreover, there is evidence that already prior to the Quran the annihilation of the tribe of Thamūd was ascribed to a divine act of punishment prompted by their sacrilegious slaughter of a camel consecrated to "the god," *al-ilāh*.[174] Nonetheless, the Zuhayr poem is probably not suggesting that all of the figures listed were disciplined for moral transgressions. More likely, the principal purport of God's exercising *ihlāk*, destruction, is that ultimately even such grand and lofty figures as Alexander the Great met their downfall and perished. This understanding is supported by the fact that the poem's preceding two verses bemoan that there is nothing subsistent and persistent in the face of life's fateful vicissitudes (*lā arā ʿală l-ḥawādithi bāqiyan / wa-lā khālidan*) except for the mountains, the heaven, the land, "our lord," and the alternation of days and nights.[175] Accordingly, the passage's contextual emphasis is on the ephemerality of human

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173. One might cast doubt on the passage's authenticity on account of this choice of words, even though the only quranic verses in which the term *jabbār* appears in direct connection with the narrative of Moses and Pharaoh are Q 28:19, where it is Moses who is accused of wanting to be one, and Q 40:35, where the term occurs at the end of a sermon delivered by an anonymous "believing man from Pharaoh's family who concealed his belief" (Q 40:28). It is true, however, that the verb *ṭaghā* is applied to Pharaoh at Q 20:24, 43, 45 and 79:17. Yet this limited degree of phraseological affinity with the Quran does not override the fact that the presence in Zuhayr's list of Luqmān and Dhū l-Qarnayn stands in conspicuous tension with their positive portrayal in the Quran. Skeptics might also point to v. 12's introductory phrase *a-lam tara anna*, which has quite a number of quranic occurrences (e.g., Q 89:6; 105:1). But this is clearly a formula that the Quran inherits from poetry; see Vollers 1903: 34, 68 (no. 5, v. 6); Ahlwardt 1870: 5^{A}, 11^{A} (al-Nābigha, no. 3, v. 9; no. 8, v. 4); Ahlwardt 1870: 116^{A} (Imruʾ al-Qays, no. 4, v. 3).

174. Sinai 2011. Interestingly, Zuhayr's Muʿallaqa links the main culprit for the Thamūd's destruction, Aḥmar, with the tribe of ʿĀd rather than Thamūd; see Ahlwardt 1870: 95^{A} (Zuhayr, no. 16, v. 31; see Arberry 1957: 116; Andrae 1926: 47); the legend evidently traveled between tribes. For a passing reference to the destruction of Thamūd, see Lyall 1913: 110^{A} and 100 (ʿĀmir ibn al-Ṭufayl, no. 7, v. 4). Oddly, Margoliouth (1925: 438) seems to insist that it is precisely the discrepancy between Zuhayr's Muʿallaqa and the Quran—namely, what he considers the former's confusion of ʿĀd with Thamūd—that points to the poem's dependence on the Islamic scripture.

175. According to the Quran, the mountains and the heaven will not eternally persist together with God but will undergo destruction when the eschatological judgment arrives (e.g., Q 73:14; 77:9–10; 78:19–20; 81:3, 11; 82:1; 84:1; 101:5). Like vv. 12–13 of the same poem, vv. 10–11 therefore involve a salient discrepancy from the Quran that is apt to increase confidence in the poem's authenticity. On vv. 10–11 of Zuhayr's poem, see also Crone 2016: 160. Crone remarks that Zuhayr "is here identifying himself as an eternalist," who views the world, time, and "our lord" as "three enduring aspects of the cosmos." The root *kh-l-d* is customarily translated as denoting eternity. One may accordingly be tempted to press the verse philosophically and wonder whether the poet's understanding of the world's eternity, its being *khālid*, specifically includes the idea of eternity into the past or eternity *a parte ante*. This would have the significant implication that the world is uncreated, in contrast to the creationist verses adduced above. However, such a reading would likely be a conceptual imposition; given the verse's effective use of the word *bāqin* as a synonym of *khālid*, the

glory and achievements, as represented by a sequence of famed bygone individuals. Although the latter's demise is cast as a result of Allāh's calamitous intervention, this intervention is not necessarily conceived as a morally proportionate response to prior misdeeds. A similarly ambivalent portrayal of Allāh emerges from a poem attributed to the legendary Dhū l-Iṣbaʿ al-ʿAdwānī, according to which "the god (*al-ilāh*) targeted with his plotting (*bi-kaydihī*) Iram and this tribe of ʿAdwān."[176] Unlike the Quran (Q 7:183; 52:42; 68:45; 86:16), there is no manifest concern here to register that Allāh's plotting only counters or preempts the machinations of sinners and unbelievers.

This view of Allāh as an agent of destruction and devastation raises the issue of the relationship between Allāh, on the one hand, and fate, doom, or the destructive course of time (*dahr*), on the other.[177] Certain verses suggest some sort of equivalence between the workings of Allāh, on the one hand, and the destructive and attritional effects of fate and time, on the other:

1. A slightly later verse in the poem attributed to Dhū l-Iṣbaʿ that was just mentioned (v. 9) deplores how *al-dahr* "transformed" the ʿAdwān, clearly not for the better. The harmful impact of time and the inscrutable "plotting" of Allāh (v. 6) are here apparently treated as identical.
2. A poem attributed to the Hudhalī poet Abū Qilāba pronounces that "the fates of death (*manāyā*) surround every human from both sides" and two verses later equates this seemingly impersonal doom—literally, that which is allotted or decreed—with the will of a personal being, most likely Allāh: "Do not say about something, 'I shall do it,' until it has become clear to you what the allocator of fates has decreed for you (*mā yamnī laka l-mānī*)."[178]

That it is Allāh who allocates human fates also emerges from the statement by al-Aʿshā, already quoted in §6, that "the human soul will meet its death in whatever manner its

core aspect of the notion of *khulūd* that is here presupposed must be persistence into the future, i.e., enduring existence in contrast to the eventual demise and disintegration that is the fate of all living beings and their creations. Whether or not the mountains and the heaven were brought into existence a finite period of time ago or not is therefore not at all in focus.

176. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 3: 11 l. 6; Brockelmann 1922: 117–18; Zaytūnī 1987: 190 (but note that it is difficult to see how this verse supports Zaytūnī's claim that the Arabs of the Jāhiliyya believed Allāh to be eternal *a parte ante*: *qadīmun mundhu l-azal*). On the poet, see Lyall 1918–24, 2: 109–10; Sezgin 1975: 297–98; on his presentation in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, see Kilpatrick 2003: 189–90.

177. On the relationship between Allāh and destructive time (*dahr*) or fate, see generally Wellhausen 1897: 222; Caskel 1926: 20–24, 54; Ringgren 1955: 46–49; Tamer 2008: 68–75. But note that the reference to Allāh in the passage by al-Khansāʾ referenced in Wellhausen (1897: 222 n. 3) and discussed in §5 above (*li-llāhi iḥlāʾun wa-imrārū*) is almost certainly secondary. This means that there is no succession of one verse referring to *dahr* and the next one referring to Allāh here.

178. Wellhausen 1884: 121 and 15[A] (no. 153, vv. 10, 12); Farrāj and Shākir 1963–65: 713; cf. Caskel 1926: 22. On Abū Qilāba's putative *floruit* before the year 600, see Hell 1932: 81; Sezgin 1975: 253.

creator, the king, has ordained for it (*mā kāna khāliquhă l-malīku qaḍā lahā*)."[179] Arguably, what we encounter in these verses is a coordination of belief in the far-reaching power of Allāh with the impersonal fatalism that is such a prevalent aspect of pre-Islamic poetry. This coordination proceeds by construing fate as a divine ordainment, meaning that the latter is ultimately subordinated to Allāh.

A similar equation of the doings of Allāh with the workings of fate and destructive time also appears in two compositions by the *mukhaḍram* poets al-Mukhabbal al-Saʿdī (d. before 656) and Labīd.[180] Although both, strictly speaking, fall outside the corpus of poetry specified in §5, they merit brief examination. The penultimate line of al-Mukhabbal's piece links the doom that has been apportioned to every individual (*al-maniyya*) with Allāh's judgment (*ḥukm*): "The fate of death will seek me out; there is no judgment like the judgment of Allāh."[181] Charles Lyall suspects that the poem's final two verses betray Islamic influence, but this assessment is at least debatable.[182] Regarding the poem by Labīd, an elegy on his deceased brother Arbad, its antepenultimate verse laments "what the course of time inflicts on a young man" (*mā aḥdatha l-dahru bi-l-fatā*) and the "calamities" (*qawāriʿ*) befalling all noble ones. The subsequent verse goes on to assert the unknowability of "what Allāh is going to do" (*mă llāhu ṣāniʿū*), apparently treating the latter formulation as roughly equivalent with the former two. The final verse then fleshes out the inscrutability of Allāh's designs by posing two questions, clearly intended to be humanly unanswerable: "When will a young man taste the fates of death (*al-manāyā*)?" and "When will rain fall?"[183] Contextually, it is clear that it is Allāh who is viewed as the death-dealer and rain-giver.

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179. Ḥusayn 1983: 83 (no. 3, v. 54). Note that the verse by Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm quoted in §6 above also predicates the verb *qaḍā* of Allāh (Kowalski 1914: 17[A] and 33 = no. 5, v. 6; see also Caskel 1926: 21).

180. On al-Mukhabbal, see Sezgin 1975: 201–2. He reportedly died at a very advanced age during the caliphate of either ʿUmar or ʿUthmān.

181. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 224, 2: 76 (no. 21, v. 39). For two detailed analyses of al-Mukhabbal's poem, see Sells 1993; Montgomery 1997: 232–39. On the term *maniyya* and its plural *manāyā*, see Caskel 1926: 22–39; Ringgren 1955: 14–25.

182. Lyall 1918–24, 2: 74. Sells (1993: 124, 133) excises the final verse, which runs: "I have found the straightest way in all things to be fear of the god (*taqwă l-ilāh*) and the worst of it to be sin (*ithm*)." The suspicious features of vv. 39 and 40 would seem to be reference to Allāh's *ḥukm* in v. 39 and the occurrence of *taqwā* in v. 40. Yet as documented elsewhere in the present essay (§8), the notion of fear (*taqwā*) of Allāh is sufficiently frequent in ancient poetry in order to count as unobjectionable; moreover, there is a verse from the diwan of Imruʾ al-Qays that juxtaposes Allāh and "sin," *ithm* (Ahlwardt 1870: 151[A] = Imruʾ al-Qays, no. 51, v. 10). In addition, it is not obvious to me that the manifest resemblance between v. 39 and quranic verses speaking of God's *ḥukm* (e.g., Q 6:57 or 12:40) is sufficient to posit quranic influence, especially given the conspicuous presence of the very un-quranic term *maniyya* in the same line.

183. ʿAbbās 1962: 172 (no. 24, vv. 18–20); Jones 1992: 86–87; Tamer 2008: 71–72.

To be sure, one may suspect al-Mukhabbal and Labīd's identification of the effects of *dahr* with the doings of Allāh to be an early post-quranic move,[184] manifesting the same fusion of pre-Islamic and quranic ideas that has been found to obtain in other *mukhaḍram* poetry.[185] After all, an explicit identification of Allāh and *al-dahr* is also enshrined in hadith reports.[186] On the other hand, we have seen that there is support for a quasi-synergetic identification of Allāh and the inexorable and baneful effects of time or fate already in bona fide pre-Islamic poetry. The phrase *mă llāhu ṣāniʿū* also occurs, in a similar context, in a poem attributed to the pre-Islamic Qays ibn al-Ḥudādiyya: "When a traveler is swallowed up by the earth, he knows what Allāh is doing (*mă llāhu ṣāniʿū*)."[187] The two passages in question are therefore explicable without positing any specifically quranic influence on them, nor do the remaining verses of the two poems bear compelling traces of Islamic or quranic influence.[188] Both texts could therefore well belong to the part of al-Mukhabbal and Labīd's oeuvre that predates their conversion to Islam.[189]

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184. Thus Tamer 2008: 72.

185. See generally Montgomery 1997: 209–57.

186. E.g., Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj 1991, 4: 1762–63 (book 40, *bāb* 1). See also van Ess 1975: 76–77.

187. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 13: 7 l. 22. There is uncertainty about the vocalization of the poet's matronymic: Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī 1927–74, 14: 144ff. offers both Ḥudādiyya and Ḥidādiyya; for a biographical entry, see al-Marzūbānī 1354*h*: 325–26; additional sources are catalogued in Sezgin 1975: 140.

188. Montgomery (1997: 236–38) detects further quranic echoes in vv. 3, 5, 10, 11, 13, 15, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 34, and 35 of al-Mukhabbal's *qaṣīda*, but none strikes me as cogent. I would similarly disagree that v. 15 of the poem by Labīd (ʿAbbās 1962: no. 24; verse numbering per ʿAbbās) "expresses a Qurʾanic sentiment" (Montgomery 1997: 243) because it employs the term *mawʿid*, "appointed time or place," which also occurs in Q 11:17 and 18:58–59. In the Quran the word connotes the inevitability of sinners encountering divine punishment, whereas Labīd applies the word to the fate of death (*maniyya*) that awaits all humans. Both usages are quite distinct. I have similar reservations with regard to v. 11: despite its use of a number of terms that also occur in the Quran (namely, *saʿīd* vs. *shaqiyy*, *naṣīb*, *qāniʿ*), the general purport of the verse is patently this-worldly, emphasizing the contrast between human prosperity and indigence as alloted by the inscrutable workings of fate, whereas the quranic occurrence of the dichotomy of *saʿīd* and *shaqiyy* (Q 11:105) is eschatological. Once again, it seems just as likely that both the Quran and Labīd are jointly reliant on shared language that is deployed in very different ways. This is well exemplified by v. 13, where the poem's speaker describes the effects of old age upon him by saying that he is "walking slowly and seeming to bend forward every time I [try to] stand up [straight] (*ka-annī kullamā qumtu rākiʿū*)" (quoting the translation in Jones 1992: 85). The participle *rākiʿ* does occur several times in the Quran (e.g., Q 38:24), yet closer inspection reveals that *r-k-ʿ* consistently refers to bowing in prayer (e.g., Q 2:43, 125; 3:43; 5:55), which is clearly not how Labīd employs the word. Finally, given the verse by Qays ibn al-Ḥudādiyya just cited in the main text, I am not persuaded that v. 19 of Labīd's poem, stating that no one knows "what Allāh is going to do" (*mă llāhu ṣāniʿū*), is an inversion of Q 29:45 (*wa-llāhu yaʿlamu mā taṣnaʿūn*; Montgomery 1997: 244).

189. Regarding Labīd's poem, could it not be the case that the penultimate verse mentioning Allāh (ʿAbbās 1962: 172 v. 19) was secondarily embedded in a poem that was originally only about *al-dahr* and *al-manāyā*? No, since the final verse (v. 20) has a pronoun referring back to the preceding verse finishing in *mă llāhu ṣāniʿū*. However, as Alan Jones (1992: 80–81) observes, the poem's final

In contrast to the idea that Allāh and fate may be equated, other verses keep the two distinct: the world's inherent disposition to ensnare and devastate humans, it is suggested, might on occasion be overridden by Allāh, who thereby assumes the role of a protector against fate.[190] This notion, which is mostly expressed by the verb *waqā*, appears in the following passages:

1. A brief poem with which al-Ḥārith ibn Ẓālim is reported to have addressed a foe who had attacked and killed members of his tribe contains the line, "The treacherous course of time has struck them with its perfidy, and he who is not protected by Allāh against the fateful vicissitudes will stumble" (*aṣābahumu l-dahru l-khatūru bi-khatrihī / wa-man lā yaqi llāhu l-ḥawāditha yaʿthurī*).[191]
2. A short poem attributed to Ufnūn bewails the manifold dangers of death and destruction (*inna l-ḥutūfa kathīratun*) and proclaims that "no man knows how to guard himself (*kayfa yattaqī*) if he does not make Allāh his protector (*idhā huwa lam yajʿal lahu llāhu wāqiyā*)."[192]
3. A *qaṣīda* from the diwan of Aws ibn Ḥajar emphasizes the danger of being overcome by his *maniyya* were he to seek out his beloved, and then proceeds to express the hope that "the god" will grant him his protection (*yaqīnī l-ilāhu mā waqā*) and enable him to escape.[193]
4. A short passage reportedly pronounced by ʿĀmir ibn al-Ṭufayl at the court of al-Nuʿmān III speaks of Allāh as "granting ascendancy to a period of time during which you are wretched" (*in yumakkini llāhu min dahrin tusāʾu bihī*).[194] Allāh, it appears, is capable of intervening in the world and overriding fate, but he may equally refrain from doing so and let doom run its course.
5. A verse by al-Nābigha, already cited above, states that a tribe was "protected" (*wuqīti*) against a Ghassānid raid thanks to Allāh (*bi-ḥamdi llāhi*).[195]

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two verses are not present in all recensions (see also Montgomery 1997: 242 n. 356). See the detailed list of witnesses in ʿAbbās 1962: 381.

190. This does not, however, mean that Allāh and *dahr* were thought to have completely separate spheres of operation (Tamer 2008: 73–74), since this would preclude Allāh's occasional role as a protector against destructive time, as documented in what follows.

191. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 10: 18 l. 23 (cited according to Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī 1927–74, 11: 97 l. 3); see Brockelmann 1922: 111. On the alleged author, see Sezgin 1975: 139.

192. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 523, 2: 202 (no. 65, vv. 3–4). The accompanying narrative, which may well be secondary, has the poet declaim the piece while facing his imminent death from a snake bite.

193. Geyer 1892: 14[A] and 59–60 (no. 23, vv. 11–12; also adduced in Ringgren 1955: 71; Zaytūnī 1987: 224). The notion is likewise articulated in an isolated verse attributed to Umayya ibn Abī l-Ṣalt ("O my soul, you have no protector other than Allāh"; see Schulthess 1911: 21, 80; Seidensticker 2011: 46), but its exclusive transmission in the quranic commentary of al-Ṭabarī gives ample cause to be cautious. For more material, see Zaytūnī 1987: 225.

194. Lyall 1913: 158[A] and 126 (frag. 18, v. 4).

195. Ahlwardt 1870: 4[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 2, v. 11).

6. The Hudhalī poet al-Burayq reminds himself of "many a day on which Allāh protected you (*waqāka llāhu*) from his *maniyya*," enabling the poet to outrun his appointed time of death (*al-ḥayn*).[196] The fact that the fate of doom is here ascribed to Allāh ("his *maniyya*") suggests a degree of intersection with the idea that Allāh is the ultimate origin and allocator of fates rather than just being capable of deflecting them.

The preceding examination of the relationship between Allāh and fate should not be misconstrued as pleading in favor of an unduly theologizing reading of all occurrences of concepts such as *al-dahr* or *al-maniyya*. In the majority of cases, pre-Islamic poets deploy these notions without any reference to Allāh, and we should accordingly resist the temptation to reconstruct a tidy and unitary poetic worldview by invariably presupposing Allāh's ultimate overlordship over or functional equivalence with destructive time wherever it figures. Allāh's identification with time or his superordination over it may well be secondary attempts at coordinating conceptual elements originating from very different outlooks on human existence in the world. Despite having had demonstrable currency and intelligibility in poetic discourse, such harmonizations should not be treated as an implicit quasi-doctrinal consensus.

196. Wellhausen 1884: 129 and 24[A] (no. 171, vv. 9–10); Farrāj and Shākir 1963–65: 757.

8. Allāh as an Equalizer of Moral Scores

The pre-quranic Allāh is a complex personality; or rather, poetic evocations of and statements about him are not devoid of internal tensions. Thus, while the previous section showed that Allāh can be portrayed as an unfathomable agent of undeserved doom and destruction, early poetry also invokes him as an agent of moral requital and score-settling, as a custodian of moral justice. While Allāh's role as a purveyor of rewards and punishments based on moral merit is, of course, a fundamental part of the Quran's own theology,[197] it is not a salient aspect of the quranic portrayal of the Associators, who come across as far more explicit about Allāh's omnipotence than his role in enforcing moral values. This latter dimension is nonetheless present in a sufficient quantity of poetic material, making it unlikely that we are here confronted with later Islamic retrojections:

1. The formulaic request *jazā llāhu*, "May Allāh requite" (or "recompense"), recurs in a sizeable number of verses.[198]
2. Al-Aʿshā confidently asserts that "the god" will recompense him for what he has done on behalf of a tribe reprimanded by him (*sa-yajzīnī l-ilāhu fa-yuʿqibā*).[199]
3. Zuhayr appeals to Allāh to reward two tribal leaders for the good they have done to their tribe.[200]
4. According to an invective credited to Dhū l-Iṣbaʿ, "Allāh knows me and Allāh knows you, and Allāh will settle your score with me and settle mine [with you]" (*allāhu yaʿlamunī wa-llāhu yaʿlamukum / wa-llāhu yajzīkumū ʿannī wa-yajzīnī*).[201]

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197. See, e.g., Q 14:51: *li-yajziya llāhu kulla nafsin mā kasabat*, "so that Allāh might recompense every soul for what it has performed."

198. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 100, 118, 2: 35, 37 (no. 12, vv. 1 and 33; al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥumām); Lyall 1918–24, 1: 316, 2: 112 (no. 30, v. 5; ʿAbd Yaghūth ibn Waqqāṣ, on whom, see Sezgin 1975: 304); Ḥusayn 1983: 387, 415 (no. 69, vv. 7–8; no. 79, v. 28; al-Aʿshā); Krenkow 1927: 50^{A} and 20 (no. 9, v. 1); 57^{A} and 23 (no. 16, v. 1; Ṭufayl ibn ʿAwf, on whom, see Sezgin 1975: 210–11); Wellhausen 1884: 136 and 31^{A} (no. 182, v. 1) = Farrāj and Shākir 1963–65: 783; Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 10: 160 l. 3; Nöldeke 1863, 50, 87 (no. 31, v. 1; Nöldeke suspects that this verse underwent Islamic revision, but his comment does not pertain to the verse-initial *jazā llāhu khayran*, but to the following *kullamā dhukira smuhū*, "as long as his name is invoked"); ʿAntara 2018: 178–79 (no. 34, v. 1; from al-Baṭalyawsī's recension of ʿAntara's diwan); Kowalski 1914: 38^{A} and 73 (no. 17, v. 6; Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm). See also Brockelmann 1922: 114; Zaytūnī 1987: 222–23.

199. Ḥusayn 1983: 167 (no. 14, v. 32).

200. Ahlwardt 1870: 90^{A} (Zuhayr, no. 14, v. 29; also quoted in ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 106 n. 5).

201. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 324, 2: 115 (no. 31, v. 16). See also Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 3: 9 l. 21, where the line is preceded by another verse containing a reference to Allāh that is not contained in the poem's recension of the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*. However, l. 20—referring to "him who makes the present world contract and expand" (*inna lladhī yaqbiḍu l-dunyā wa-yabsuṭuhā*—shows too much phraseological overlap with Q 2:245 (*wa-llāhu yaqbiḍu wa-yabsuṭu*) to be usable in this context. See also Margoliouth 1925: 438.

5. A poem ascribed to al-Nābigha lays down the principle "With Allāh rests [responsibility for] the requital of men" (*wa-ʿinda llāhi tajziyatu l-rijālī*).[202] Al-Aṣmaʿī disputed that the poem was really authored by al-Nābigha,[203] but the purport of the hemistich is very much in line with the *jazā llāhu* verses just referenced, so there is no question here of an anachronistically Islamic coloring.

As regards the particular norms and values enforced by Allāh, these prominently include the obligations of hospitality and blood-vengeance as well as adherence to contracts and oaths.[204] A literary reflection of Allāh's responsibility for avenging perjury can be seen, for instance, in a verse by ʿAwf ibn al-Aḥwaṣ that appeals to Allāh to obliterate him should he fail to keep his sworn promise never to blame his beloved.[205] In poetry, of course, oaths and imprecations by Allāh, which are frequent, can have a purely rhetorical function, just as contemporary speakers of English might use "O God!" or "Mother of Christ!" as fossilized markers of emphasis. This is well illustrated by the exclamation opening a poem by ʿAntara: "May Allāh curse [literally, wage war against] the worn-out ruins (*a-lā qātala llāhu l-ṭulūla l-bawāliyā*), and may he curse your remembrance of years gone by!"[206] Nonetheless, it is arguable that such exclamatory invocations of Allāh, conventionalized though they may be, instructively presuppose his preeminence and his ability to inflict untoward consequences. This is most clearly articulated by al-Nābigha, who accentuates an oath to the effect that he is innocent of treachery toward his patron by exclaiming that "there is no recourse for a man beyond Allāh" (*wa-laysa warāʾa llāhi li-l-marʾi madhhabū*). To swear by Allāh, it appears, is to invoke the highest conceivable authority.[207]

While Allāh functions as a guarantor of covenants between different tribal groups,[208] he can also be mentioned in connection with inner-tribal conflicts and with moral infractions generally.[209] Thus:

1. ʿAbd Yaghūth ibn Waqqāṣ invokes Allāh's punishment against his own tribe, apparently for forsaking him in battle (*jazā llāhu qawmī*).[210]

202. Ahlwardt 1870: 21^{A} (al-Nābigha, no. 19, v. 17).
203. Ahlwardt 1870: 111.
204. Wellhausen 1897: 222–24; Brockelmann 1922: 113–15; Zaytūnī 1987: 234–38.
205. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 343, 2: 125 (no. 35, v. 6). On the poet, see Sezgin 1975: 220.
206. Ahlwardt 1870: 51^{A} (= ʿAntara, no. 26, v. 1). For some examples of oaths and curses by Allāh, see Lyall 1918–24, 1: 513, 2: 197 (no. 61, v. 9); Nöldeke 1863: 26, 70 (no. 3, v. 13); Ḥusayn 1983: 195 (no. 18, v. 43), 281 (no. 34, v. 29), 333 (no. 53, vv. 13–14); Ahlwardt 1870: 36^{A} (= ʿAntara, no. 6, v. 4); and the following verses from the corpus of Imruʾ al-Qays: Ahlwardt 1870: 143^{A} (no. 44, v. 5); Ahlwardt 1870: 147^{A} (no. 48 = the Muʿallaqa, v. 25; see Jones 1996: 66); Ahlwardt 1870: 152–53^{A} (no. 52, vv. 21, 22, 25).
207. Ahlwardt 1870: 5^{A} (al-Nābigha, no. 3, v. 3); Arberry 1965: 34–35; Zaytūnī 1987: 198, 235.
208. Wellhausen 1897: 223–24.
209. See already Wellhausen 1897: 224: "But Allāh's eye also guards general moral principles."
210. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 316, 2: 112 (no. 30, v. 5; already quoted in n. 198 above).

2. ʿUrwa ibn al-Ward labels those dissuading him from his love interest Salmā "enemies of Allāh" (*ʿudāt allāh*), on account of the deceit and falsehood of which he accuses them.[211]
3. The penultimate verse of a *qaṣīda* by al-Nābigha, aimed at regaining the favor of his patron, states that Allāh "only accepts justice and fidelity (*abă llāhu illā ʿadlahū wa-wafāʾahū*)"; the following hemistich highlights the difference between what is known to be right (*maʿrūf*, *ʿurf*) and what is disapproved (*nukr*), asserting that the former will not "go to waste" (*ḍāʾiʿ*).[212]

It is significant that there is little poetic evidence that Allāh's retribution and recompense were commonly taken to involve an afterlife (with the exception of material likely to be post-quranic,[213] such as the couplet ascribed to Zuhayr that was discussed in §5).[214] For instance, an imprecation from the diwan of Imruʾ al-Qays appeals to Allāh to disfigure (*qabbaḥa*), mutilate (*jaddaʿa*), and cover in dust (*ʿaffara*) various tribal collectives, in retaliation for their failure to assist those who sought refuge with them.[215] All the divine chastisements envisaged here would seem to be decidedly this-worldly.[216] The only compelling piece of counter-evidence that I have come across occurs in one of the panegyrics that al-Aʿshā is said to have devoted to Qays ibn Maʿdīkarib. It maintains that not even a monk who is continuously engrossed in prayer is "more fearful of the [final] accounting" than its addressee (*bi-aʿẓama minhu tuqan fī l-ḥisāb*), "when the [resurrected] souls will shake off the dust" (*idhă l-nasamāt nafaḍna l-ghubārā*).[217] There is also an allusion to the eschatological judgment by Labīd that may conceivably predate his conversion, although a conclusive verdict in favor of its authenticity seems much less certain than in the case of

211. Nöldeke 1863: 19, 66 (no. 1, v. 11).

212. Ahlwardt 1870: 20[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 17, v. 32).

213. For instance, I would not accept that a verse from the Labīd corpus that speaks fairly unequivocally about eschatological reward and retribution (ʿAbbās 1962: 257 = no. 36, v. 11; translation in Montgomery 1997: 254) forms cogent evidence for pre-Islamic ideas (see n. 218 below).

214. See already the similar assessment in Andrae 1926: 43–44.

215. Ahlwardt 1870: 156[A] (no. 57, vv. 1–4; see Jamil 2017: 153–55; v. 1 is also cited in Zaytūnī 1987: 227).

216. For a similar use of *jadaʿa*, see Ahlwardt 1870: 109[A] (ʿAlqama, no. 8, v. 3); see also Zaytūnī 1987: 227.

217. Ḥusayn 1983: 53 (no. 5, vv. 62–64); see also ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 133. The term *ḥisāb* is, of course, quranic (e.g., Q 40:17, 27), but as pointed out in n. 92 above, there are rabbinic and Syriac precedents for describing God's eschatological judgment as a "calling to account." Note also that the words *nasama*, *nafaḍa*, and *ghubār* do not appear in the Quran, the quranic word for "soul" being *nafs*. Regarding the root *gh-b-r*, see the use of *ghabara*, "dust," at Q 80:40, but there it is only the evildoers whose faces are said to be covered with dust, by way of a token of their abject humiliation, whereas al-Aʿshā does not hint at any such distinction. In sum, unlike the couplet attributed to Zuhayr discussed above, which exhibits multiple points of contact with quranic diction, there is no reason to impugn the authenticity of the al-Aʿshā verse.

al-Aʿshā.[218] Finally, as Tor Andrae points out, al-Nābigha asserts—in a verse already partially cited above—that the Ghassānids have a religion (*dīn*) that is firm (namely, Christianity) and that "the only thing they fear are [eschatological?] consequences" (*fa-mā yarjūna ghayra l-ʿawāqibī*).[219]

None of the verses just adduced calls into doubt the general assessment that poetry likely to be authentically pre-Islamic does not normally cast Allāh as an agent of an eschatological requital.[220] Nor would it be justified to infer from the fact that pre-Islamic poetry uses the term *al-dunyā* ("the present or proximate life") that it must therefore presuppose

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218. The verse in question, an elegy on al-Nuʿmān III ibn al-Mundhir (named in vv. 12 and 41) occurs in ʿAbbās 1962: 254–66 (no. 36), a poem that is translated and discussed in Montgomery 1997: 254–57; Imhof 2004: 62–82. According to v. 11 (ʿAbbās 1962: 257), "every human will one day come to know his striving (*saʿyahū*) when it will be disclosed before the god (*al-ilāh*) what has been extracted (*maḥāṣil*)." This should be compared with the use of *saʿy* at Q 53:40 and elsewhere, and also the use of *ḥ-ṣ-l* at Q 100:10. While Montgomery (1997: 257) is unwilling to endorse even the poem's ascription to Labīd, Agnes Imhof (2004, 66–69) views it as authentic and does not consider it to display a quranic imprint. She thereby rejects Brockelmann's view that the elegy was composed after Labīd's conversion to Islam, which would improbably place it decades after the death of al-Nuʿmān. Although Imhof's general reasoning is plausible, it does not necessarily establish the genuineness of individual lines. In any case, despite tangible affinity with quranic notions and phraseology, the poem also exhibits some conspicuous differences with the Islamic scripture. This is illustrated not only by the reference to *al-dahr* in v. 4, but especially by v. 9. According to a hadith, its first hemistich ("Is not everything other than Allāh futile?"; cf. Q 22:62; 31:30) was approvingly quoted by the Prophet, who then, however, tacitly went on to replace the second hemistich ("And must not every pleasure, *naʿīm*, come to an end?") with an entirely different one ("And Ibn Abī l-Ṣalt nearly submitted [to God]"). The reason for the substitution must be that the poem's original text clashes with quranic references to paradise as *jannāt al-naʿīm* in combination with statements to the effect that heaven and hell are eternal (e.g., Q 2:25, 82); see ʿAbbās 1962: 256; and, e.g., Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj 1991, 4: 1768–69 (book 41). In sum, the poem may well be pre-quranic, but the status of the eschatological allusion in v. 11 is difficult to determine with confidence.

219. Ahlwardt 1870: 3[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 1, v. 24); Fayṣal 1968: 56 = no. 4, v. 9. See Andrae 1926: 44.

220. Andrae cites a couplet ascribed to al-Nābigha asserting outright that "the graves have not cast forth the dead" (*wa-lam talfiẓi l-mawtă l-qubūru*; Ahlwardt 1870: 166[A] = no. 14; cf. Fayṣal 1968: 213 = no. 50, with one additional verse; see Andrae 1926: 44, where the sentence is translated in the present tense). However, the fragment is not part of al-Shantamarī's version of the diwan proper, so it will need to be treated with caution. More importantly, Andrae probably misunderstood the context of the statement quoted by him; the point seems to be (per al-Ḥittī 1991: 46) that the poem's speaker refuses to accept the death of Ḥiṣn, given that "the mountains have broken loose" (*wa-l-jibālu jumūḥū*, preferring the vocalization of al-Ḥittī; Fayṣal 1968: 213 has *wa-l-jibālu junūḥū*) at the enormity of the event (as if the end of the world had come), yet the graves have not cast forth the dead nor have heaven and earth perished (as would be expected if the end of the world had really arrived). The fragment therefore presupposes, rather than denies, the resurrection of the dead. Hence, if it could be admitted as genuine it would constitute evidence in favor of al-Nābigha's acceptance of the resurrection.

its quranic antonym *al-ākhira*, meaning the world to come (e.g., Q 2:200, 201).[221] For however much the two terms are conjoined in the Quran, the same is not true for pre-Islamic poetry, and we cannot accordingly press references to *al-dunyā* to yield an implicit understanding of an afterlife presided over by a divine judge. Rather, the prevailing spirit would seem to be that expressed in a line from the diwan of Imruʾ al-Qays: "Enjoy the present life, for you shall pass away (*tamattaʿ mina l-dunyā fa-innaka fānin*) from intoxication and beautiful women."[222] What the poetic usage of *al-dunyā*, "the proximate life," implies, therefore, is not the availability of a full life beyond the present one, but only the existence of an inevitable barrier, death, making everything this side of it "proximate." Overall, the virtual absence to Allāh as an eschatological judge doubtlessly coheres well with the fact that the finiteness of human existence and the impossibility of unending human persistence into the future (expressed by the root *kh-l-d*) are well-established poetic topoi,[223] notwithstanding the notion of a ghost-owl (*hāma*) in the shape of which the spirit of the dead might persist in an attenuated form of being.[224]

It is noteworthy, although perhaps not surprising, that just as poetry does not generally cast Allāh as an eschatological judge, he is similarly not credited with any revelatory activity. Allāh punishes the violation of general moral norms, and perhaps also of certain cultic practices such as the Meccan pilgrimage ritual (see §9 below), but he is virtually never said to have instituted or promulgated any of these norms, whether moral or cultic, at a specific moment in the past—in marked contrast to the Pentateuchal scenario according to which YHWH proclaimed a wide-ranging body of behavioral principles and rules to the Israelites at Sinai. A rare exception is al-Nābigha's allusion to the Ghassānids' possession of a "scripture" vouchsafed by "the god" (*majallatuhum dhātu l-ilāhi*).[225] Yet Allāh's apparent lack of specifically revelatory activity must not be confused with general inactivity, for, as we saw above, poetry does portray him as exercising ultimate control over individual and collective destinies. Allāh, in other words, was assumed to *act* but not to *communicate*. Whereas poetry simply tends to omit any mention of revelatory activity on Allāh's part, the quranic pagans seem to have been more explicit about the topic, insofar as they are presented as expressly rejecting the view that an ordinary human like Muḥammad might be an emissary of Allāh. But their opposition, as far as it can be reconstructed from the Quran, was not grounded in a general denial that Allāh might communicate with humans at all, but rather was supported by pointing out that Muḥammad was a mere human rather than an angel

221. This is noted in Margoliouth 1925: 438; see, for instance, Lyall 1913: 80^{A} and 64 (ʿAbīd, no. 30, v. 28) as well as the material found in Arazi and Masalha 1999: 458. Margoliouth deems this to be a clear indication of dependence on the Quran, but I am very doubtful.

222. Ahlwardt 1870: 159^{A} (Imruʾ al-Qays, no. 63, v. 13). Note that *dunyā* and *m-t-ʿ* are also combined in Lyall 1913: 80^{A} and 64 (ʿAbīd, no. 30, v. 28).

223. See, e.g., the material catalogued in Arazi and Masalha 1999: 424 and Izutsu 2002: 47–54.

224. Zaytūnī 1987: 259–66; Jamil 2017: 99–100, 103, 172.

225. Ahlwardt 1870: 3^{A} (al-Nābigha, no. 1, v. 24). Note, however, that a variant has *makhāfatuhum* instead of *majallatuhum* (Ahlwardt 1870: 2; Fayṣal 1968: 56 = no. 4, v. 9).

(e.g., Q 25:7). Thus, the quranic pagans appear to have accepted that Allāh might dispatch at least angelic messengers.[226]

As highlighted by the Dhū l-Iṣbaʿ verse quoted earlier in this section, Allāh's ability to function as an agent of moral requital (albeit not by means of otherworldly rewards and punishments) is supported by his superior knowledge of events past and present. In other pre-Islamic poetry too we find an insistence on God's comprehensive knowledge and perceptual awareness:

1. "Allāh is seeing and hearing (*rāʾin wa-sāmiʿū*)," states a poem attributed to Qays ibn al-Ḥudādiyya,[227] which recalls quranic verse-final clausulae calling God "hearing" (*samīʿ*) and "seeing" (*baṣīr*; e.g., Q 4:58, 134), although not, in my view, to a degree that would require us to assume quranic influence.[228]
2. ʿAbīd ibn al-Abraṣ asserts that "Allāh knows what I do not know" about the fate of his tribe (*allāhu yaʿlamū mā jahiltu bi-ʿaqbihim*).[229]
3. "We dealt with them as [only] Allāh knows," says the Muʿallaqa of al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza.[230]

Allāh's effective omniscience, then, is a topos that has to be assumed to have had currency prior to the Quran.[231]

Given Allāh's ability to inflict detrimental consequences on the survival and prosperity of offenders, being fearful or wary of him figures as a strong moral deterrent. Thus, Allāh is not only a source of protection (*w-q-y*) against doom and death, but also someone against whom one must protect or guard oneself (*ittaqā*). Wellhausen cites a verse attributed to ʿAmr ibn Shaʾs: "Were it not for fear of Allāh (*ittiqāʾ allāh*) and for the treaty [between us]," he says, the father of a woman coveted by him would have met his death.[232] The line does not make for an ideal piece of evidence, insofar as ʿAmr is not only reported to have

226. Crone 2016: 102–24.

227. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 13: 6 l. 14.

228. Brockelmann (1922: 109) cites another occurrence of "Allāh is seeing and hearing (*rāʾin wa-sāmiʿū*)" in Geyer 1892: 52 and 12[A] (no. 18, v. 2), but, as noted by Geyer (1892: 51), this poem is also contained in the diwan of Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr, which makes it more difficult to insist on independence from the Quran. Cf. Q 22:61, 75; 31:28; 58:1; at Q 76:2 it is, exceptionally, God making humans *samīʿ* and *baṣīr* that is highlighted.

229. Lyall 1913: 50[A] and 42 (ʿAbīd, no. 16, v. 10); Jones 1992: 65. Given that Allāh's knowledge is sufficiently attested (in addition to these references, see also Lyall 1918–24, 1: 708, 2: 298 = no. 106, v. 6), I am skeptical of Jones's assessment that *allāhu yaʿlamu* "must be under suspicion as a later change" (Jones 1992: 65).

230. Lyall 1894: 140 (v. 75; translation adapted from Arberry 1957: 226; also cited in ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 111 n. 3). See similarly Farrāj and Shākir 1963–65: 1240 (v. 5; ascribed to Abū Khirāsh or Taʾabbaṭa Sharran).

231. See Brockelmann 1922: 108–9.

232. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 10: 66 l. 10, cited in Wellhausen 1897: 222–23; also ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 106. Cf. the variant in Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī 1916: 46[A] l. 11.

lived into the Islamic period but also to have converted and to have participated in the battle of Qādisiyya.[233] Yet there is enough further evidence to lend credence to the claim that there is nothing suspiciously Islamic about the verse's wording as such:

1. The phrase "were it not for fear of Allāh" (*law lă ttiqāʾu llāhi*) also occurs in the Hudhalī corpus.[234]
2. Aws ibn Ḥajar asks a tribe that he deems to have violated a protective covenant, "Are you not fearful of Allāh?" (*a-lā tattaqūna llāha*).[235]
3. ʿAbd Qays ibn Khufāf counsels his son, "Allāh, fear him (*fa-ttaqihī*) and honor vows to him."[236]
4. A verse from the corpus of Zuhayr parses the virtue of *taqwā*, fearful wariness, in terms of being restrained from moral lapses by Allāh and by the dictates of kinship (*raḥim*).[237]
5. In a brief piece disparaging the consumption of wine and praising thriftiness, al-Mutalammis declares that "fear of Allāh (*taqwă llāh*) is the best equipment."[238]
6. Imruʾ al-Qays says that it would have amounted to a "sin against Allāh" (*ithm min allāh*) to imbibe wine before having discharged the duty of blood revenge.[239]
7. A passage transmitted under the name of Umayya ibn Abī l-Ṣalt that may well be authentic extends the remit of fear (*makhāfa*) of Allāh (here designated with the term *rabb*) to the animal kingdom, specifically, to snakes charmed by means of uttering the deity's name.[240]
8. Al-Aʿshā's panegyric addressed to a Jewish tribal leader, quoted earlier in this section, links the notion of fear (here: *tuqan*) with the eschatological reckoning (*ḥisāb*) and the resurrection.[241]

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233. Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī 1916: 46[A]; al-Marzūbānī 1354*h*: 212–13; Sezgin 1975: 228.

234. Wellhausen 1884: 138 and 32[A] (no. 185, v. 1); Farrāj and Shākir 1963–65: 793. The reported author is Salmā ibn al-Muqʿad, whom Hell (1932: 81) places in the period between ca. 575 and 625. Hell rejects the authenticity of this verse (p. 89), but given the other material cited in the main text I cannot see a compelling reason for this.

235. Geyer 1892: 91 and 25[A] (no. 38, v. 7; see also Ringgren 1955: 71; Zaytūnī 1987: 229).

236. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 750, 2: 322 (no. 116, v. 3).

237. Ahlwardt 1870: 99[A] (no. 17, v. 35; cited in Brockelmann 1922: 113; Izutsu 1964: 235; ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 106).

238. Vollers 1903: 42, 70 (no. 8, v. 6; also quoted in ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 111).

239. Ahlwardt 1870: 151[A] (Imruʾ al-Qays, no. 51, v. 10; see Wellhausen 1897: 224 n. 4; Brockelmann 1922: 114; also quoted in ʿAlī 1968–73; Zaytūnī 1987: 201). On the consumption of wine only becoming licit after blood revenge has been taken, see the verse from a poem attributed to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in Jones 1992: 241. Note that Jones reserves judgment on the poem's authenticity, however (pp. 229–30).

240. Schulthess 1911: 31, 90–91 (no. 28, v. 6); see Seidensticker 2011: 49–50, with further references.

241. Ḥusayn 1983: 103 (no. 5, v. 64).

In sum, the pivotal position that is occupied by the virtue of God-wariness (*taqwā*) in the Quran has substantial precedent in pagan pre-Islamic poetry.[242] Although in poetry the verb *ittaqā* + accusative, "to guard oneself against," often takes as its object not Allāh but some worldly danger or foe, the evidence compiled above casts some doubt on Izutsu's claim that pre-Islamic poetry mostly evokes the concept of wariness "in a physical or material sense" and that the way in which *taqwā* is used in the verse by Zuhayr just quoted "was not normally the meaning of the word in [the] Jahiliyyah."[243] Admittedly, it may well prove to be correct, from a purely quantitative perspective, that pre-Islamic poetry employs *ittaqā* and *taqwā* less often with Allāh as the explicit or implied object than with some other being or danger if one were to classify all the relevant occurrences in, say, al-Shantamarī's *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn* according to these two categories.[244] Nonetheless, the contrast between poetry and the Quran should not be overdrawn, and the perception that the quranic emphasis on the virtue of God-wariness stands in an inevitably antithetical relationship to the pre-Islamic pagan "canon of virtues" as expressed in poetry is not tenable.[245] It is true though that poetry shows almost no sign of the Quran's intensification of the concept of *taqwā* by imbuing it with the supreme danger of eschatological perdition.[246] What is novel in the Quran, then, is not the basic notion of God-wariness as such, but rather what one might call its eschatological supercharging, as a result of which it comes to dwarf other ethical qualities.

242. It may be added that the poem by the *mukhaḍram* poet al-Mukhabbal al-Saʿdī that was briefly discussed earlier ends with the sapiental coda, "I have found the straightest way in all things to be fear of the god (*taqwă l-ilāh*) and the worst of it to be sin (*ithm*)" (Lyall 1918–24, 1: 224, 2: 76 = no. 21, v. 40). However, the authenticity of this verse has been disputed, even if I am not convinced that it exhibits a manifestly Islamic imprint (see n. 182 above). See also al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī 2000: 21, cited above ("It is as if your lord created no one else but you among all of mankind in order to be afraid of him"; no. 1, v. 7).

243. Izutsu 1964: 237, 235, respectively.

244. See Arazi and Masalha 1999: 1246–47.

245. This is to take issue with aspects of the remarks in Neuwirth 2019a: 63, 70 (though not with her emphasis on the approximate equation between *taqwā* and *eusebeia*).

246. On the quranic concept of *taqwā*, see Izutsu 1964: 234–39; Sinai 2017a: 165–66; Sinai 2017b: 228.

9. Prayers and Sacrifices Addressed to Allāh

Does the range of human responses to Allāh attested in poetry transcend moral God-wariness and include aspects of prayer and worship? Discounting two inconclusive pieces of evidence,[247] the following material suggests an affirmative answer:

1. ʿAdī ibn Zayd concludes a poem by proclaiming his trust in "a lord who is near and responsive" (*rabb qarīb mustajīb*). The point of the verse would seem to be to juxtapose Allāh's amenability to human pleas with his former patron al-Nuʿmān, who had imprisoned him.[248]
2. Al-Aʿshā swears by "the lord of those who prostrate themselves in the evening" (*wa-rabbi l-sājidīna ʿashiyyatan*). The context makes it likely that he is referring to Christian prayer rituals rather than to pagan practices; but the implication is nonetheless that the *rabb* in question—whom we may assume to be identical with Allāh, in line with what was said above (§5)—is an appropriate addressee of liturgical veneration.[249]
3. Al-Aʿshā portrays his own daughter as exclaiming, "O my lord (*yā rabbi*), spare my father weariness and pain!" A slightly later verse explicitly classes this utterance as a prayer (verb: *ṣallā*).[250]

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247. The first is a verse ascribed to ʿAbd Yaghūth ibn Waqqāṣ calling the members of the tribe of Taym "servants (*ʿibād*) of Allāh"; Lyall 1918–24, 1: 318, 2: 112 (no. 30, v. 11); see Wellhausen 1897: 224 n. 5, quoting the same verse from Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 15: 76 l. 12; Brockelmann 1922: 115. However, the phrase may simply be a circumlocution of the tribal name *taym*, which is a synonym of *ʿabd*, rather than a label for all humans, as Wellhausen thought (Lyall 1918–24, 2:114). It is in any case not specified how, precisely, Allāh is being served. The second is a verse by al-Aʿshā asserting that "my lord is generous and he does not sully a favor (*lā yukaddiru niʿmatan*), and when he is implored (*yunāshadu*) by means of written sheets (*bi-l-mahāriq*) he answers (*anshadā*)" (Ḥusayn 1983: 279 = no. 34, v. 13; also quoted in ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 107). Even though both Ḥusayn and ʿAlī take the lord at hand to be Allāh, the context of the verse—namely, the preceding reproaches by a female interlocutor (Qutayla) who remarks on the poet's bedraggled appearance, culminating in the question whether his *rabb* has gone absent, thereby reducing him to poverty—makes it more likely that v. 13 is spoken in defense of a human patron. This is also how the verse is understood in Lane 1984, 2: 2793b.

248. Al-Muʿaybid 1965: 41 = no. 3, v. 32; trans. in Horovitz 1930. See also Andrae 1926: 45.

249. Ḥusayn 1983: 227 (no. 23, v. 16).

250. Ḥusayn 1983: 151 (no. 13, vv. 9, 12). The divergence from standard Islamic terminology, according to which the utterance of the poet's daughter would amount to an act of *duʿāʾ* rather than *ṣalāh* (cf. the footnote at the bottom of p. 151), is revealing. Note that two other passages from the diwan of al-Aʿshā describe a Jewish wine merchant pronouncing a blessing (*ṣallā*) over a jar of wine (Geyer 1905: 58–59, 203; Ḥusayn 1983: 85 [no. 4, v. 11], 343 [no. 55, v. 4]).

4. In a poem already cited above, al-Nābigha beseeches Allāh to grant al-Nuʿmān perpetual survival (*nasʾalu llāha khuldahū*); the context is one in which the patron is carried on a bier (*naʿsh*), perhaps on account of a grave illness.[251]
5. A verse ascribed to ʿAbīd ibn al-Abraṣ avows, "He who asks of humans will only meet with refusal, but he who asks of Allāh will not be disappointed (*wa-sāʾilu llāhi lā yakhībū*)."[252]

We can safely take it for granted that an Arabophone Christian like ʿAdī ibn Zayd would have endorsed the efficacy of prayer to Allāh. Nonetheless, even his poetry would not have addressed an exclusively Christian audience. This applies to al-Aʿshā as well, despite his confessional identity being difficult to determine with confidence. The reported supplication of his daughter certainly tallies well with the quranic evidence that the Associators would appeal to Allāh in situations of distress. Al-Nābigha's petition too, hyperbolic though it is, would seem to be proffered in the face of an emergency, namely, a situation in which his patron is critically ill. The general implication, again, is that Allāh was not viewed as a *deus otiosus* but as being just as capable of responding to human appeals for assistance as he was of avenging a violation of oaths sworn in his name.

Perhaps most importantly, there is a significant amount of poetic support for a cult of Allāh at the Meccan sanctuary:

1. A poem attributed to ʿAdī ibn Zayd famously swears by "the lord of Mecca and of the cross" (*rabbi makkata wa-l-ṣalībī*).[253] It stands to reason that the "lord of Mecca" here cannot be Hubal, whose idol was reportedly located inside the Kaʿba,[254] but must be Allāh, who would have been by far the most suitable candidate for identification with the "lord of the cross."[255]
2. Rāshid ibn Shihāb emphasizes a claim about his tribe's genealogical descent with an oath by "the house of Allāh" (*bayt allāh*).[256]

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251. Ahlwardt 1870: 11[A] (no. 8, vv. 4–5). The poem is explicitly linked to an illness of al-Nuʿmān in the poem's superscript in the recension of Ibn al-Sikkīt (Fayṣal 1968: 130; for the slightly variant text of the two verses in this recension, see Fayṣal 1968: 130 = no. 21, vv. 4–5).

252. Lyall 1913: 8[A] and 19 (no. 1, v. 23). According to one recension, v. 23 is followed by two additional lines that are an obvious Islamic interpolation (stating inter alia that Allāh has no associate, *sharīk*). Lyall (p. 17) entertains the idea that the same might apply to the verse at hand. However, the verse by al-Aʿshā just cited provides some confirmation that the notion that Allāh was open to human prayers for assistance is not necessarily Islamic. See also ʿAlī 1968–73, 6: 109–10, who is overall less critical than Lyall.

253. Cheikho 1890: 451 l. 13; al-Muʿaybid 1965: 38 (no. 3, v. 10); Brockelmann 1922: 100; Izutsu 1964: 104. The poem is partially translated in Horovitz 1930: 45–46.

254. See Pavlovitch 1998–99 and n. 283 below.

255. Taking issue with Izutsu's treatment of the verse, Pavel Pavlovitch (1998–99: 56) denies that it contains "any tangible clue that could lead to the conclusion that *rabbu makkata* here is no one else but Allah." Nonetheless, for the reason set out above, as well as due to the references to *bayt allāh* that are adduced in what follows, I consider Izutsu's understanding of the verse to be sound.

256. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 615, 2: 249 (no. 87, v. 7). On the poet, see Sezgin 1975: 160–61.

3. The final line of a brief piece attributed to Qays ibn al-Ḥudādiyya mentions the provision of water for "the pilgrims of the house of Allāh."[257]
4. The Medinese poet Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm exalts Allāh for the defeat of an enemy tribe with the words: "Praise be to Allāh, [lord] of the edifice!" (*al-ḥamdu li-llāhi dhī l-baniyyati*), a likely allusion to the Kaʿba.[258]

We may accordingly infer that Allāh was considered to be the patron deity of the Meccan shrine already prior to Muḥammad's preaching, thus aligning with quranic passages that cast Allāh as the "lord" (*rabb*) of "this settlement" (Q 27:91) and "this house" (Q 106:1–4) or that remind its addressees of Allāh's protective care over Mecca (Q 14:35–37; 28:57; 29:67). The quranic and poetic evidence are therefore mutually corroborative, however Hubal might fit into the picture. Against this background, the following oaths and other references are defensibly taken to refer to Allāh:

1. ʿAntara underscores his love for ʿAbla with an oath "by the lord of the house" (*wa-rabbi l-bayti*).[259]
2. An invective poem by al-Aʿshā contains an oath "by the lord of the [sacrificial animals] dancing toward Minā" (*ḥalaftu bi-rabbi l-rāqiṣāti ilā minan*). Confirmation that the *rabb* at hand is Allāh is the fact that two later verses belittle the poet's adversary by stressing that he does not belong to the inhabitants of al-Ṣafā, does not have the right to drink from the water of Zamzam, and has not been provided by "the Merciful" with a house in the sanctified space (*muḥarram*). Evidently, it is "the Merciful" who is assumed to have the authority to dispose of the sacred precinct.[260]
3. Al-Nābigha lends emphasis to his denial that he is guilty of insulting his patron by swearing an extended oath "by the life of him whose Kaʿba I have stroked and by the blood that has been spilled on the sacrificial stones" (*fa-lā la-ʿamru lladhī massaḥtu kaʿbatahū / wa-mā hurīqa ʿalā l-anṣābi min jasadī*) and "by him who grants security to the birds seeking protection (*wa-l-muʾmini l-ʿāʾidhāti l-ṭayra*), who are stroked by the riders heading for Mecca (*rukbānu makkata*)."[261]
4. ʿAwf ibn al-Aḥwaṣ stresses a promise never to blame his beloved by swearing "by him to whose sacred precincts (*maḥārim*) the Quraysh go on pilgrimage, and by that which Ḥirāʾ gathers together," likely an allusion to pilgrims or sacrifices.[262]

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257. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 13: 6 l. 5. For another oath by "the house of Allāh," see Zaytūnī 1987: 183, citing a verse ascribed to Ḥātim al-Ṭāʾī.

258. Kowalski 1914: 31[A] and 62 (no. 13, v. 12).

259. Ahlwardt 1870: 45[A] (ʿAntara, no. 21, v. 10); Zaytūnī 1987: 183.

260. Ḥusayn 1983: 173 (no. 15, vv. 30–31, 35–36); cf. the parallels listed in Geyer 1919: 208.

261. Ahlwardt 1870: 7–8[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 5, vv. 37–38). A textual variant for v. 37 has *alladhī qad zurtuhū ḥijajan* (Ahlwardt 1870: 6), which is the version quoted in Zaytūnī 1987: 197. Yet given the ensuing reference to "the riders heading for Mecca" (i.e., pilgrims), this variant does not call into doubt that the poet is referring to the Meccan sanctuary. A variant for v. 38 replaces the birds by gazelles.

262. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 342–43, 2: 125 (no. 35, v. 4).

5. In a poem whose context is a military conflict between the Hawāzin, on the one hand, and Quraysh and Bakr, on the other, Khidāsh ibn Zuhayr (or, alternatively, ʿAwf ibn al-Aḥwaṣ) evokes the fact that the Quraysh have since ancient times (*fī awwali l-dahri*) been endowed with a "helper" (*nāṣir*).[263]
6. The poetic record also contains miscellaneous references to specific aspects of the Meccan pilgrimage rituals, such as an oath by "the house around which circumambulation is performed by men of Quraysh and Jurhum, who built it," which occurs in the Muʿallaqa of Zuhayr.[264] Even where such verses lack explicit mention of Allāh, they illuminate the cultic actions performed on his behalf.

In sum, there is poetic evidence associating Allāh with a pilgrimage sanctuary in general and with the Meccan Kaʿba specifically, and with rites like sacrifice and circumambulation that also figure in the Quran. It is worth noting that the sacrificial stones that al-Nābigha links with the deity of the Kaʿba are explicitly condemned in the Quran (Q 5:3, 90). Similarly, when the verse by ʿAwf ibn al-Aḥwaṣ just referenced evokes the pilgrims or sacrifices "that Ḥirāʾ gathers together" (*wa-mā jamaʿat ḥirāʾ*), this suggests, as Lyall highlights, that Ḥirāʾ "was one of the holy places about Mecca which were revered and visited at the Pilgrimage in the times of paganism."[265] Of course, as far as we can tell, Ḥirāʾ was never part of the post-quranic Islamic pilgrimage circuit. In both cases we are therefore confronted with noticeable discrepancies from standard Islamic practice that further increase the likelihood that the cluster of verses just surveyed is authentic.[266]

A further potential reference to Allāh's link with the Meccan sanctuary, less straightforward than those reviewed above, occurs in another poem from the diwan of al-Nābigha, which mentions a journey, likely a pilgrimage journey, undertaken on behalf of "the god." Whether or not the destination at hand may be identified with the sanctuary of Mecca hinges on a crucial textual variant. The verses in question run as follows:

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263. Lyall 1918–24, 1: 716, 2: 305 (no. 108, v. 3). On Khidāsh, see Sezgin 1975: 219. On the probable authenticity of this verse, see Lyall 1918–24, 2: 305 n. 3. One version of the poem has a variant for the second hemistich that explicitly evokes the assistance of "the Merciful" (*al-raḥmān*); see Lyall 1918–24, 1: 715, note s. Caskel (1966, 2: 347) denies that the poem is by Khidāsh.

264. Ahlwardt 1870: 94[A] (Zuhayr, no. 16, v. 16); Zaytūnī 1987: 182. For more references to the Meccan pilgrimage ritual, see Ahlwardt 1870: 89[A] (Zuhayr, no. 14, v. 6, referring to the shaving of the pilgrims' heads at Minā); Lyall 1919: 15, 20 (no. 2, vv. 9–10; ʿAmr ibn Qamīʾa, mentioning his tribe's allegiance to "the *ḥajj*" in connection with the performance of sacrifices); Geyer 1919: 208–9; Zaytūnī 1987: 198–99; Miller 2016: 304–5. Mecca is not, however, the only sanctuary that appears in poetry: al-Aʿshā mentions the Kaʿba of Najrān (Ḥusayn 1983: 223 [no. 22, v. 26]), a verse that is also referenced in the relevant entry of *Kitāb al-Aṣnām* (al-Kalbī 1914: 44–45).

265. Lyall 1918–24, 2: 126.

266. For other examples of this line of reasoning, see Miller 2016: 304–5 and n. 175 above. For an important caveat to arguments of this type, see n. 171 above. For another oath "by the sacrificial stones between which blood is shed (*yusfaḥu*)," see Ahlwardt 1870: 72[A] (Ṭarafa, no. 18, v. 1; see Zaytūnī 1987: 199); see also al-Mutalammis's oath by "Allāt and the sacrificial stones" (Vollers 1903: 23, 65 = no. 2, v. 1).

May Wadd [variant: my lord] preserve you; it is not licit for us / to divert ourselves with women, for religion (*dīn*) has become [our] resolve,

exerting ourselves on sunk-eyed [camels] with fastened nose-reins, / in hopeful striving for the god (*al-ilāh*) and for piety (*birr*) and provisions.[267]

If one takes the invocation of the deity Wadd rather than "my lord" to be the original text, the ensuing epithet *al-ilāh*, "the god," could designate Wadd rather than Allāh, in which case the pilgrimage destination at hand may be conjectured to be not Mecca but Dūma, where Wadd is said to have had a temple.[268] On the other hand, given that another poem by al-Nābigha does explicitly mention the Meccan sanctuary,[269] it may also be the case that the poet is invoking one deity and then announcing his intention to perform the pilgrimage on behalf of another one, namely, "the god," used in its customary sense as an epithet for Allāh. This reading is supported by the fact that an alternation between Allāh and *al-ilāh* is well attested in poetry, whereas, apart from the present passage, I have not come across any prooftexts corroborating the same for other gods.[270] The poem would thus combine a reference to the Meccan pilgrimage and to Allāh with an oath by Wadd.

Al-Nābigha's putative juxtaposition of Wadd and Allāh in two consecutive verses highlights a peculiar fact: while the corpus of early Arabic poetry contains references to both Allāh and other deities, explicit statements about their relationship are extremely difficult to come by. Possibly the only pertinent passage in this respect is a verse attributed to Aws ibn Ḥajar, in which the speaker swears "by Allāt and al-ʿUzzā and who serves them, and by Allāh; verily, Allāh is greater than they" (*wa-bi-llāti wa-l-ʿuzzā wa-man dāna dīnahā / wa-bi-llāhi inna llāha minhunna akbarū*).[271] Given the lack of similar material, our usual recourse to cumulating evidence is unavailable here; but if one is content to place the burden of proof on the skeptic, the hierarchical subordination of other deities to Allāh, which is such a conspicuous feature of the religion of the quranic pagans, would have at least an isolated poetic parallel, even though the precise nature of the relationship between Allāh and the two goddesses still remains unspecified.[272]

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267. Ahlwardt 1870: 25[A] (al-Nābigha, no. 23, vv. 6–7); *ḥayyāki waddun* in Fayṣal 1968: 106 (the recension of Ibn al-Sikkīt) instead of Ahlwardt's *ḥayyāki rabbī*. The purport of *dīn* here is glossed as *ḥajj* in al-Ḥittī 1991: 160. Given the context of traveling on camelback, this is plausible. The verse is also quoted in Zaytūnī 1987: 198.

268. Al-Kalbī 1914: 10; Wellhausen 1897: 14–18; Fahd 1968: 184, 186–87.

269. Ahlwardt 1870: 7–8[A] (no. 5, vv. 37–38; quoted above).

270. Zaytūnī 1987: 198 appears to entertain both possibilities, without, however, considering what this might imply for the identity of the pilgrimage destination being referred to.

271. Geyer 1892: 36 and 7[A] (no. 11, v. 2); Brockelmann 1922: 115; Zaytūnī 1987: 191–92 (with an explicit defense of the authenticity of the second hemistich).

272. As further evidence of the subordination of other deities to Allāh, Zaytūnī (1987: 192) cites a cultic invocation (*talbiya*). However, given its use of quranic phraseology (*lā sharīka lak*, cf. Q 6:163) it is hardly a reliable piece of evidence; in fact, Zaytūnī's own observation (p. 204) that no derivatives of *sh-r-k* in the sense of associating other deities with Allāh occur in pre-Islamic poetry

The quranic pagans, by contrast, had a much more developed understanding of this relationship that was predicated on the notion of intercession and on conceiving their subordinate deities as angels or as daughters of Allāh. The apparent absence of such a theology of subordination in the poetic corpus is perhaps its most conspicuous divergence from the quranic data. It is possible that this absence is simply due to the poets' relative lack of interest in systematic theological thought. Alternatively, the emergence of a well-articulated theology of subordination to Allāh may have been a relatively recent innovation in the cultural environment addressed by the quranic proclamations, a development that did not therefore leave palpable traces in the poetic tradition apart from the verse just cited. Given Allāh's role as the patron of the Kaʿba, the quranic pagans' theology of subordination clearly buttressed the preeminence of Mecca's intramural sanctuary.[273] The articulation of Allāh's relationship to other deities in terms of the concept of intercession or the latter's status as angels may accordingly be a distinctively Meccan theological development.

constitutes a compelling argument against the authenticity of this invocation. For a general assessment of the authenticity of the transmitted *talbiya* formulae, see Seidensticker 2010; on the *talbiya* at hand, see ibid., 306.

273. Sinai 2017a: 69–70.

10. Allāh, Pagan Monotheism, and Late Antiquity

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions. The first observation to make is to reiterate that there is overall a good degree of general conceptual fit between how Allāh was viewed by the quranic pagans and how he is described in pre-Islamic poetry, even if we avoid relying on poetic verses that are phraseologically redolent of the Quran. Core aspects of this shared understanding of Allāh concern his creation of the cosmos and of humans in particular as well as his provision of rain and his general supremacy over the world, with a marked emphasis on his power to determine the outcome of present goings-on. Inversely, neither the quranic pagans nor the mainstream of pagan pre-Islamic poetry view Allāh as playing an eschatological role.[274] This accords with the fact that the doctrinal epicenter of the early quranic proclamations—the idea of a universal judgment of the resurrected[275]—met sustained and well-argued resistance among the quranic pagans.[276] It is worth noting that this general fit between the religious views of the Associators and those enunciated or presupposed by pre-Islamic poetry is significant not least because the poems in question were composed by authors hailing from and active in different regions of the Arabian peninsula and its northern margins, whereas the quranic Associators would seem to be a much more localized community.[277]

There are three main discrepancies between poetry and the quranic presentation of the Associators. First, the latter do not appear invested in the ideology of a heroic but ultimately futile struggle against the crushing power of time (*dahr*) and the fates of death (*manāyā*) that is so central to the value system of early Arabic poetry, even if they are on one occasion (Q 45:24) quoted as invoking *al-dahr* in order to mount an argument against the quranic argument from Allāh's destruction of previous communities to his ability to resurrect and judge the dead.[278] Accordingly, there is no positive evidence that the quranic Associators equated or aligned Allāh with the impersonal forces of doom and destruction that pervade Arabic poetry. The explanation for this discrepancy may be that the poets' ideology of heroic fatalism was not a worldview that invariably shaped everyday behavior, or that it was not a worldview that invariably shaped everyday behavior in early seventh-century

274. See also Hirschberg 1939: 73–78 (noting inter alia the paucity of eschatological material even in the poetry attributed to Umayya); Zaytūnī 1987: 250–57.

275. Sinai 2017a: 162–69; Sinai 2017b.

276. Crone 2016: 125–82.

277. An obvious next analytical step would be to attempt to correlate certain theological notions and phraseology with specific regions of the peninsula with which the relevant poets and their tribes are associated.

278. But see Crone 2016: 160, who questions whether Q 45:24 can be assumed to employ *dahr* with its full poetic resonance. In the end, the brevity of the passage makes this impossible to verify or falsify.

Mecca.[279] (This does not entail that poetry did not circulate in the quranic milieu.) But it is, of course, also conceivable that the quranic portrayal of the Associators simply omits whatever views they may have held on fate and the attritional course of time.

A second discrepancy is engendered by the fact, already noted above, that quranic paraphrases of the Associators' views do not give prominence to the notion of Allāh as an agent of moral requital. The quranic Associators do, however, swear by Allāh (Q 6:109; 16:38; 35:42),[280] which would at least seem to presuppose that Allāh will avenge oaths not kept. In general, the Associators' understanding of Allāh's demands on their behavior is decidedly on the ritualistic side: as Crone has shown, they believed that Allāh demanded abidance by certain taboos and sacrificial customs.[281] One quranic verse even cites Muḥammad's opponents as justifying unspecified abominations (*idhā faʿalū fāḥishatan*) by saying, "We found our forefathers practicing it and Allāh ordered us to do it" (*wa-llāhu amaranā bihā*, Q 7:28). Crone comments that the quranic pagans do not seem to have "distinguished sharply between divine injunction and ancestral norms,"[282] but it nonetheless appears that they considered Allāh not only to enforce certain (possibly ritual) norms but also to have instituted them in some form, after which they were handed down by means of ancestral tradition. Of course, poetry too links Allāh with the cult of the Meccan sanctuary and thereby associates him with ritual customs, but the poets' emphasis on Allāh's oversight over ethical norms is not paralleled by the quranic Associators. The principal reason for this may be that the Meccan pagans took a prevalent interest in Allāh's endorsement of local ritual. In any case, both the Quran and poetry clearly confirm that there was a pre-quranic cult of Allāh, as Crone highlights in an important correction of statements by Wellhausen and Brockelmann.[283] The salience of local context also provides a plausible explanation for

279. See also Ringgren 1955: 58–60.

280. Crone 2016: 65. All three verses employ the phrase *aqsamū bi-llāhi jahda aymānihim*. This also appears in Q 5:53 and 24:53, but there the speakers are not the Meccan pagans.

281. Crone 2016: 64–65.

282. Crone 2016: 65.

283. Wellhausen 1897: 219, 221–22; Brockelmann 1922: 119–20; Crone 2016: 80. Note that Wellhausen and Brockelmann both admit a gradual intrusion of Allāh upon the Meccan cult prior to the Quran (see also Brockelmann 1922: 102). What they hold, then, is not that Allāh did not have a cult in pre-Islamic Arabia at all, but rather that he was not *originally* approached through cultic worship. However, their suggestion that Allāh displaced the original deity of the Meccan sanctuary, Hubal, is not certain; it may equally be the case, as proposed in Krone 1992: 478–80, that it was Hubal who formed a secondary addition to the sanctuary, perhaps due to his oracular credentials. Crone has expressed doubts about the idea that both deities could have coexisted at the same shrine, highlighting that "no pre-Islamic sanctuary … is known to have accommodated more than one male god, as opposed to one male god and female consort"; given that "the Hubal-Allāh sanctuary of Mecca is an oddity," she therefore suggests that "there would seem to be at least two sanctuaries behind the one depicted in the tradition" (Crone 1987: 193, 195). Nonetheless, it appears questionable whether a lack of explicit parallels pertaining to other Arabian shrines is sufficient grounds for ruling out that the pre-Islamic Kaʿba could have been a site of worship for both Hubal and Allāh, especially given the fact that the Meccans had a handy theology of subordination that would have enabled them to account for Hubal's role beside Allāh—namely, to bring them closer (*qarraba*) to the latter (Q 39:3).

a third and final discrepancy, also already noted above: the fact that the Associators had a far more developed understanding of the relationship between Allāh and other deities than is observable in poetry.

By way of a final remark on how the quranic Associators compare to poetry, it is worthwhile observing that we have encountered at least some poetic prooftexts for the divine name *al-raḥmān* ("the Merciful"). Among them is an invective poem by al-Aʿshā that employs *al-raḥmān* and Allāh in consecutive verses, thus ruling out any doubt that they might have different referents.[284] This material corroborates Crone's rejection of the conventional supposition that it was only the preacher of the Quran who introduced the identification of Allāh with "the Merciful": as she observes, the divine name *al-raḥmān* also appears in quranic quotations of Muḥammad's pagan opponents, and verses that have often been interpreted as attesting to the pagans' unfamiliarity with the name *al-raḥmān*, such as Q 25:60, do not in fact bear out such a conclusion.[285] Identifying Allāh with "the Merciful" would have been anything but far-fetched, insofar as Ḥimyaritic inscriptions document not only that the Ancient South Arabian term *raḥmānān* was used to designate the Jewish and the Christian god, but also that *raḥmānān* was described as the "lord of the heaven and the earth."[286] As we saw in §6, Arabic poetry likewise associates Allāh with mastery over the sky (which, according to one verse, he created and whose precipitation of rain he was believed to control) and over the earth, as in ʿUrwa ibn al-Ward's reference to "Allāh's lands" (*bilād*). Furthermore, Ḥimyaritic epigraphy uses *ʾl* and *ʾlh* as alternative designations for *raḥmānān*.[287] Given such South Arabian precedents, it is not surprising that at least some poets as well as the quranic pagans took Allāh and *al-raḥmān* (*raḥmānān*) to be the same deity.

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284. Ḥusayn 1983: 173 (no. 15, vv. 36–37: "The Merciful has not appointed your house at an elevated place in … Allāh has built my house among …"). Brockelmann 1922: 106 additionally cites Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī [1868], 13: 8 l. 10 (attributed to Qays ibn al-Ḥudādiyya): *shakawtu ilă l-raḥmāni buʿda mazārihā*, "I complain to the Merciful about the distance of her abode [i.e., of the poet's beloved]."

285. Crone 2016: 66–68. The verse runs: "When they are told, 'Prostrate yourselves to the Merciful (*al-raḥmān*),' they say, 'What is the Merciful? Are we to prostrate ourselves to what you command us?' And it increases their aversion." As Crone observes, "the response [in vv. 61ff.] is not an explanation of al-Raḥmān's relationship with Allāh … but rather praise of Him as the creator and mention of the gratitude He deserves"; vv. 63, 68, and 70 then use the two divine names interchangeably, "without any attempt to persuade the audience that the two are identical; this is simply taken for granted" (Crone 2016: 68). The point of the question, "What is the Merciful?," then, is to all intents and purposes clarified by the following question, "Are we to prostrate ourselves to what you command us?": it is to voice disdain for the quranic Messenger's claim to exercise prophetic authority on behalf of an exclusive deity. See already al-Farāhī 2002: 185–89.

286. Robin and Rijziger 2018: 280–83. The epithet "lord of the heaven and the earth" is biblical; see, e.g., Matthew 11:25 (*kyrie tou ouranou kai tēs gēs*, Peshitta: *mārā da-šmayyā w-d-arᶜā*), corresponding to the quranic *rabb al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* (Q 43:82; 44:7; 45:36; 78:37).

287. Robin and Rijziger 2018: 278–80.

If we widen our focus to include the Ancient North Arabian material, a first question to arise is the ultimate geographical origin of Allāh, understood as a specific pagan deity. In 1992, Krone plumped for the Safaitic or Nabataean spheres.[288] This is perhaps not unlikely, but the epigraphic data's patchiness and lack of detail make discussion of the issue inevitably speculative; for all we know, it may well be that an individual deity by the name Allāh, resulting from a transformation of the title *al-ilāh* into a quasi-proper name, emerged in more than one locale and that these deities subsequently merged into one. This was, in effect, already proposed by Wellhausen, even if his particular formulation of the idea has failed to meet with scholarly favor.[289] Yet while the Ancient North Arabian evidence does not conclusively illuminate the ultimate origin of Allāh, at least beyond the general observation that he was a pagan North Arabian god, these data are nonetheless crucial, for they throw into relief a conspicuous level differential between Allāh's supremacy in poetry and in the belief system of the quranic pagans, on the one hand, and his fairly limited importance in the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, on the other. How to explain the development from the latter to the former?

Crone rightly notes that the idea of a supreme god who is superior to, or encompasses, various subordinate deities is already found in late classical paganism.[290] There was a well-documented cult of *theos hypsistos*, the "high god," in the ancient world, which notwithstanding important "cross-fertilization" with Judaism has been described as a specifically pagan version of monotheism.[291] It is noteworthy that pagan worshippers of *theos hypsistos*, like the quranic pagans, employed the concept of angels by way of describing the status and function of subordinate deities.[292] Arabian views about Allāh's preeminence thus have broad structural parallels in wider Mediterranean religious history. However, the heyday of the pagan cult of *theos hypsistos* was in the second and third centuries CE.[293] This is, very approximately, a period contemporary with the Safaitic inscriptions yet considerably earlier than the earliest extant parts of the Arabic poetic corpus, which do not take us back much beyond the sixth century.[294] It would be unconvincing to posit that pagan monotheism simply took a few centuries to filter over into the steppes and deserts of Arabia. Why a few centuries later rather than not at all? What happened between the Safaitic inscriptions and the appearance of Arabic poetry that could have occasioned Allāh's steep rise to preeminence, as documented by poetry and eventually also by the quranic portrayal of Muḥammad's pagan adversaries?

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288. Krone 1992: 471–73.

289. Wellhausen 1897: 218–19; Brockelmann 1922: 103–5; Hawting 1999: 27–28; Crone 2016: 79–80.

290. Crone 2016: 80–82.

291. Mitchell 1999: 114.

292. Mitchell 1999: 86, 102–5. This illustrates that there is no reason to follow Brockelmann (1922: 102) in considering it to be improbable that the Meccan pagans might have used the term "angels."

293. For more on chronology, see Mitchell 1999: 108–10.

294. See Wagner 1987: 40–41; Montgomery 1997: 1–4; Miller 2016: 37–38.

What happened was, of course, a much closer integration of Arabophone communities into the wider late antique world. Christian missionaries had been active among Arabic-speaking tribes from the fourth century onward,[295] but the latter's involvement in the wider political and cultural context of the late antique Near East was decisively precipitated by an escalation of Roman-Sasanian warfare from the beginning of the sixth century onward. In this conflict, both empires subsidized proto-Arab allies such as the Ghassānids and the Lakhmids to engage in proxy warfare with each other and to hold in check tribal groups beyond the imperial frontiers.[296] Cultivating a "bedouinizing" cultural taste, the Lakhmids and, to a lesser degree, the Ghassānids patronized poetry produced by authors from nomadic tribes,[297] al-Nābigha being an obvious example. Even if the ultimate origins of Arabic poetry lie in a nomadic tribal milieu,[298] imperially sponsored phylarchs and kings must have been part of the political and cultural horizon of its practitioners from early on.[299] It is important to note that imperial vassals like the Lakhmids and the Ghassānids were either adherents of or engaged in sponsoring some form of Christianity.[300]

In such a situation of cultural encounter between pagan nomadic tribes and imperial vassals with Christian affiliations, Allāh would have functioned as an expedient currency of conceptual exchange. Pagan and Christian producers and consumers of Arabic poetry patently recognized each other as referring to the same deity when invoking Allāh or *al-ilāh*: as we saw above, the Christian ʿAdī ibn Zayd strikingly conflated "the lord of Mecca and of the cross," while al-Nābigha addressed the (eventually baptized) Lakhmid king al-Nuʿmān III and the Ghassānid ruler ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥārith with verses invoking Allāh's power over nature and human destinies and declaring that the Ghassānids possessed a "scripture" bestowed by "the god" (*majallatuhum dhātu l-ilāhi*).[301] Thus, references to Allāh were intelligible both to Christians, who would have been disposed to equate him with the biblical god, and to pagans, who were able to conceptualize Allāh as the ultimate overlord over a pantheon of inferior deities and to view him as functionally equivalent (or at least intimately linked) with the impersonal notions of attritional time (*dahr*) and insidious doom (*maniyya*) that formed the lynchpin of the heroic ethics of tribal poetry. It may well be this bidirectional intelligibility of pre-Islamic notions of Allāh across the

295. Greg Fisher, Philip Wood, et al., in Fisher 2015: 276–372; more concisely, see Hoyland 2001: 147–50.

296. Fisher 2011; Peter Edwell et al., in Fisher 2015: 214–75. The qualifier "proto-Arab" is intended to recognize the argument made by Webb (2016: 23–109) to the effect that full Arab ethnogenesis was a consequence rather than a precondition of Islam.

297. Montgomery 1997: 8; Montgomery 2006: 55–58.

298. Cf. Montgomery 2006: 75–76 n. 124, taking issue with Glen Bowersock's statement that "the emergence of Arabic court poetry was inspired by the Hellenic model."

299. See Miller 2016: 76, who writes that "*qaṣīdah* poetry is … in one sense the nomadic response to elite-controlled confederations sponsored by sedentary imperial powers"; see also Montgomery 2006: 57–58.

300. Fisher 2011: 34–71; Fisher 2015: 313–63.

301. Ahlwardt 1870: 3^{A} (no. 1, v. 24). But as pointed out earlier, there is a variant that has *makhāfatuhum* instead of *majallatuhum* (Ahlwardt 1870: 2; Fayṣal 1968: 56 = no. 4, v. 9).

pagan-Christian divide that played a significant role in propelling him to prominence in the pre-quranic centuries. The quranic polemics against the Associators, in conjunction with poetic evocations of the Meccan sanctuary, demonstrate that this notion of Allāh was not an exclusively literary phenomenon but had significant inner-Arabian traction, insofar as it formed the theological foundation of an important Arabian shrine.

In brief, my proposal is to account for the rise of Allāh as a process of discursive and cultural alignment with the theological koine of late antique culture, which had come to be permeated by the idea of one supreme deity, whether or not that deity was considered to be the sole one or omnipotent.[302] It is pertinent to recall in this context the poetic use of the phrase *bi-ḥamdi llāhi / bi-ḥamdi l-ilāhi / al-ḥamdu li-llāhi* that we encountered above (§7). *Al-ḥamdu li-llāhi* not only occurs in the Quran, but is also a recognizable echo of Christian liturgical language.[303] The fact that verses by pagan Arabic poets should casually incorporate a phrase descended from Christian doxologies (Greek *doxa tō theō*, Syriac *teshbuḥtā l-allāhā*) indicates that ancient Arabic poetry, despite its tribal and pagan background, is a part, however distinctive and peripheral, of the discursive world of late antiquity rather than sitting in splendid cultural isolation from it. The same applies to the virtue of *taqwā*, which could be readily identified with the biblical concept of "fear of the Lord."[304]

The pagan Arabian alignment with prevalent late antique notions of the divine that I have posited on the basis of poetic evidence does not routinely appear to have extended to ascribing revelatory communiations to Allāh nor to the idea of an eschatological judgment and an ensuing afterlife. This may not be coincidental. The idea that human existence is a prelude to an eternity of posthumous consequences, advantageous or injurious, is apt to generate significant soteriological pressure requiring a comparatively complex ritual and creedal infrastructure. Christianity as well as Manichaeism, the two main missionary religions of late antiquity, were only too willing to offer soteriological relief to potential converts, yet pre-Islamic notions of Allāh evaded any such pressure. They thereby provided a serviceable theological superstructure for indigenous cults predicated on the sacrificial propitiation of native Arabian deities as well as for the ethics of heroic self-assertion in the face of relentlessly destructive time that is formulated in Arabic poetry. Pre-Islamic conceptions of Allāh as a kind of *theos hypsistos*, then, ensured that those recognizing his supremacy were ideologically intelligible to sedentary and frequently Christianized populations yet able to withstand the soteriological pull of Christianity. This is not to overlook that it may also have been manifestly useful for a society composed of intermittently warring tribes without any centralized authority to develop the notion of a deity enforcing basic moral obligations—such as the validity of covenants and the duties of hospitality—

302. See Fowden 1993.

303. Baumstark 1927: 234–39. Dost (2017: 86–91) emphasizes the prevalence of the root *ḥ-m-d* in Sabaic epigraphy, both pagan and monotheistic.

304. *Yirʾat YHWH*, e.g., Isaiah 11:2–3 or Proverbs 1:7, corresponding to Greek *phobos theou* and Syriac *deḥlteh d-māryā*. See Alexander 2002: 194; Neuwirth 2019a: 63, 70.

between members of different tribal groups: Allāh's rise may owe much to the fact that he performed this function, too.

Just as Paul's missionary successes presupposed gentile constituencies who were familiar with or at least open to the idea of a "living God, who made the heaven and the earth" and who provided "rain from heaven and fruitful seasons" (Acts 14:15–17),[305] so the Quran addresses an audience that held structurally similar beliefs about Allāh. If we place the North Arabian epigraphic data, the poetic evidence, the religious views and practices of the Associators as inferable from the Quran, and finally the Quran's own theology in a sequence, the resulting trajectory progresses toward an ever more substantial and dominant role for Allāh. Nonetheless, there is no inevitability inherent in this progression, especially not in the final step leading from the Associators' belief in Allāh's supremacy over miscellaneous subordinate deities to the quranic denial of any divine beings other than Allāh. The religion of the quranic Associators had nothing intrinsically unstable or incoherent about it that would justify viewing the emergence of the Quran as an ineluctable consequence of prior developments.[306] Admittedly, in the far-reaching absence of any notion of an ultimate eschatological righting of all wrongs, poetry can occasionally depict Allāh's impact on the human sphere as inscrutable, destructive, and arbitrary, contrary to the quranic insistence that Allāh "does not do a grain's weight of wrong" (*inna llāha lā yaẓlimu mithqāla dharratin*, Q 4:40). Nonetheless, there is no reason to view this as a fatal crack in pre-quranic Arabian notions of the divine that would have engendered the Quran's eschatological form of monotheism simply by way of discursive necessity. After all, occasional complaints about God's inscrutability and apparent cruelty and capriciousness resurface in later Islamic discourse.[307]

305. See Mitchell 1999: 121.

306. This important point is made in Ammann 2001: 64–69. See also Crone 2016: 55, 60–61, 63, emphasizing that the inconsistency of the Associators' worldview is in the eye of the Quran.

307. Ritter 1978: 159–80.

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