

WHO WERE THE DAUGHTERS OF ALLAH?

By

DONNA RANDSALU

B.A., University of British Columbia, 1982.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(RELIGIOUS STUDIES)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September 1988

© Donna Kristin Randsalu, 1988

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of RELIGIOUS STUDIES

The University of British Columbia
1956 Main Mall
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1Y3

Date OCT. 17, 1988

ABSTRACT

Who were the Daughters of Allah, the three Arabian goddesses mentioned in the Qur'an and venerated by the pagan Arabs prior to the rise of Islam, and who since have vanished into obscurity? Can we reconstruct information about these goddesses by reference to earlier goddesses of the Near East? It is our intention to explore this possibility through an examination of their predecessors in view of the links between the Fertile Crescent and the Arabian Peninsula. Moving back in time from the seventh century A.D. (Arabia) through the Hellenistic Period (Syro/Phoenicia 300 B.C.-A.D.300) to the end of the second millennium, we shall examine those goddesses whose attributes most closely resemble the Arabian goddesses.

By necessity, we will confine ourselves primarily to the goddesses of ancient Canaan¹ (Astarte) and Syria (Atargatis), compelling resemblances of these goddesses to the Arabian goddesses of the seventh century being the basis for their selection.

This exploration, then, takes place in the Fertile Crescent, that region of the Near East "forming an arc between the head of the Persian Gulf and the south-east corner of the Mediterranean

¹Canaan (Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine) in early times extended from Hamath in the north to Gaza (Gen.10.19), and included lands east and west of the Jordan (Josh.11.3).

Sea"². These lands are a natural physical extension of the Arabian Peninsula and its inhabitants naturally migrated into these regions. As well, there is the linguistic, and, therefore, cultural, affinity of the Semitic peoples of the Fertile Crescent with those of the Arabian Peninsula, so that a search for the heritage of the Arabian goddesses would be likely to begin here.

²Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present, 10th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 11.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1.	AN EXAMINATION OF ARABIC SOURCES . .	3
	The Qur'an: Etymological and Internal Analyses	
CHAPTER 2.	AN EXAMINATION OF OTHER ARABIC SOURCES .	15
	Ibn al-Kalbi	
	Epigraphic Analysis	
CHAPTER 3.	A GEOGRAPHICAL SURVEY	25
	The God Athtar in the South	
	Al-Hijaz	
CHAPTER 4.	THE NABATAEANS	39
CHAPTER 5.	PALMYRA, A CORNERSTONE	47
	The Cult of Allat Assimilated with Near Eastern Deities: Allat/Astarte; Allat and Atargatis; Ishtar/Athena	
	Manat and Al-Uzza at Palmyra	

CHAPTER 6.	THE PHOENICIAN/SYRIAN COUNTERPARTS . . .	62
------------	--	----

ASTARTE

ATARGATIS

CONCLUSIONS	86
-----------------------	----

REFERENCE LIST	106
--------------------------	-----

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Hanna Kassis for his time and patience in the completion of this work. His steady support and encouragement throughout truly influenced this endeavour. My sincere appreciation also is extended to Professor Anderson and Professor Mosca of the Department of Religious Studies who, in the course of my studies, taught me the invaluable skill of critical thinking which has since greatly benefited my research. I am indebted, as well, to the capable assistants at the A.M.S. Word Processing Centre whose expertise was extremely helpful in the final stages of completion.

INTRODUCTION

The intention of this thesis is to examine the problem of the identity of the Daughters of Allah. Other than a brief reference to them in the Qur'an, and scattered literary and epigraphical remains, the pagan past has all but been erased. What little survived the new religion of Muhammad in the seventh century, was subject to the inevitable bias of Muslim commentators who, writing on the preceding era, referred to it as the 'age of barbarism', and whose recordings must, therefore, be viewed in this light. As a consequence of this, and the scarcity of tangible evidence, the reconstruction of pre-Islamic religion has been fraught with inconsistencies and lacking consensus.

From the earliest of times, commercial trade relations existed between the ancient Arabs and their neighbours: the caravan highway, which originated in South Arabia bringing goods from India and the Far East, made its way along the west coast (al-Hijaz) branching off at the northern trading posts to Egypt, the Mediterranean ports, and Syria and Babylonia. The resulting interaction of cultures thus perpetuated the exchange of ideas, customs, and, particularly, religious practices. Contrary to initial observations, it would appear that the religion of the pagan Arabs was not an isolated one, but, in fact, a complexity of prevailing thoughts.

Considering the close cultural and linguistic ties of the predominantly Semitic Arabian Peninsula, we shall examine South Arabian and Syro/Phoenician material to determine what light might be shed on this problem.

CHAPTER ONE

AN EXAMINATION OF ARABIC SOURCES

The Qur'an makes explicit reference to the Daughters of Allah in Sura 53.19-23:

"Have you considered El-Lat and El-Uzza
and Manat the third, the other?
What, have you males, and He females?
That were indeed an unjust division.
They are naught but names yourselves
have named, and your fathers'; God has
sent down no authority touching them.
They follow only surmise, and what the
souls desire ..."¹

Other than this single verse which names the goddesses, there is no further hint as to who they were or the position they occupied in pre-Islamic religion. In order to identify these goddesses, then, if in fact this can be done, we shall pursue two modes of analysis: the first will be an etymological analysis whereby some understanding of the goddesses may be gleaned from the source (root) of their names; the second, an internal analysis, will examine the writings of historians and scholars on the Qur'an as they pertain to the Daughters of Allah.

According to the traditional view², Allat is derived from

¹Arthur J. Arberry, The Koran Interpreted, 2 vols. combined in one, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955). References to the Qur'an have been taken from this source throughout this paper unless otherwise specified.

²The traditional view is presented in A Concordance to the Koran, trans. from Arabic into English by Hanna E. Kassis (Berkeley and Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1983).

the root L Y T. Besides Sura 53.19, there is only one other word used in the Qur'an which derives from this root and that is the word 'laata' meaning to diminish, to withhold. Unfortunately, this meaning seems unrelated to the meaning of Allat and offers nothing to the understanding of the name. While the traditional view may be the prevailing view, it does little to solve our problem, and therefore we, as others before us, shall look further for more enlightening possibilities. The general opinion among scholars is that the name Allat derives from al-ilahat meaning "the goddess"³. This primitive form, as it is referred to, was gradually contracted into "al-Ilāt" known as the middle stage, and finally into "Lat", the most recent form. Hitti writes of her "al-Lat (from al-Ilahah, the goddess) ..."⁴

Another theory is that the name al-Lat is derived from the root L T T. According to Fahd, "Arab lexicographers are unanimous in considering that al-Lat is derived from the verb latta, to mix, to knead, barley-meal (sawik)"⁵. This interpretation is based on the presence, in the temple of Jerusalem, of an 'oblation of jealousy' which presumably represented the Canaanite/Phoenician goddess Ashtoreth. This 'oblation of jealousy', which was made out of barley-meal, determined the guilt or innocence of wives suspected by their

³F.V.Winnett, "The Daughters of Allah," Muslim World vol.30 (1940):121.

⁴Hitti, History of the Arabs, 99.

⁵The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition, 1986 ed., s.v. "al-Lat", by T.Fahd.

husbands of infidelity. In his account, Kitab al-Asnam, Ibn al-Kalbi refers to a "certain Jew"⁶ in al-Taif, who was a latt al-Sawik, "kneader of barley-meal"⁷, and who used to sit beside the rock symbolizing Allat. The assumption has been made on the basis of this that Astarte and Allat have common roots; that is, Allat was one of the incarnations of the Semitic Ba'la of which Astarte was the most eminent, and that the ritual, that was performed in Jerusalem to determine infidelity, was performed in al-Taif near the stone of Allat. The term Allat (al-Lat), then, is merely an epithet of the primitive Semitic Ba'la which is in keeping with the Semitic tradition of the anonymity of deities.

Finally, there is the possibility that the name Allat is the feminine form of Allah, supreme god of pre-Islamic Arabia. The derivation of her name from his suggests a close relationship, possibly daughter or wife, just as the Canaanite goddess Elat was the wife of her progenitor, El. A basic feature of ancient Semitic pantheons was the intimate relationships of its deities that represented the element of reproduction in man and in nature; Allah/Allat (El/Elat), then, formulated that essential male/female dichotomy from which all life flowed. Against this background, Allat may have originated as the wife/daughter of Allah, a relationship which, in Arabia, was since tempered by time into an impersonal (or asexual) one.

⁶Ibn al-Kalbi, Kitab al-Asnam (The Book of Idols), trans. Nabih Amin Faris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 14.

⁷Fahd, "al-Lat".

The name Uzza is derived from the root ' Z Z⁸. Words derived from this root are: 'azzaza;, the verb to strengthen, to reinforce; 'a'azza, the verb to render powerful, to exalt; 'azza, the verb to conquer, to overcome; 'aziiz, the noun meaning great, strong, might. In the Qur'an, the word Uzza is used predominantly in reference to Allah, "the Almighty", "the All-Strong". The goddess al-Uzza was undoubtedly the personification of all these traits ... Uzza, the Most Mighty. As the planet Venus, which she is believed to have represented, her mightiness and strength would have been reflected in the brilliance of the morning star that far surpassed the rest.

The name Manat may be derived from two compatible yet distinct roots. The first possibility is the root form M N N⁹, the verb 'manna', of which means to be gracious to, to show grace to, to favor, to bestow, to give liberally. The noun mannan (not found in the Qur'an¹⁰) means kind, benign, munificent, generous, benefactor, the Benefactor; also, manun has the meanings indebted, obligated, obliged, grateful, thankful. From this, it can be theorized that Manat was seen, at least in some aspect, to be a Benefactor endowed with positive qualities such as generosity, grace, munificence; On the other hand, such words as indebted, obligated, obliged suggest a contractual relationship

⁸Kassis, A Concordance to the Koran.

⁹Kassis, Ibid.

¹⁰All words not found in the Qur'an are taken from A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, ed. J.Milton Cowan, 4th ed. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979).

between the goddess and her worshippers. Her beneficence rested on the continued veneration paid to her. Should this fail, the consequence, judging from the derivative words reproach, diminished, failing, would be some sort of chastisement ... from diminished generosity to perhaps complete abandonment (failing).

The root form M N N also has the derivative word manun meaning Fate, Time. It is from this aspect of the root M N N that most scholars attribute the origins of the goddess Manat. Buhl says we can know her from her name "which may safely be connected as a plural (for manawat) with the Aramaic menata, plur. menawata, portion, lot, Hebrew mana plur. manot and also with the god of fate meni."¹¹ He gives the Arabic counterpart maniya (plur. manaya) meaning "the allotted, fate, especially of death."¹² Winnett suggests that her name is connected with the root mana, "to determine, mete out"¹³. He also draws attention to the Hebrew god meni (Destiny), and his association in Isaiah 65.11 with a god of Fortune, concluding from this association that the two shared similar characteristics. For Winnett too, then, Manat was the goddess of Fortune. However, he disagrees with Buhl's conclusion that the name Manat is an Aramaic plural form and instead argues that the Arabic form m n t (as opposed to the Aramaic m n w t) is the original one, hence "the goddess is

¹¹The Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1936ed., s.v. "Manat," by Fr. Buhl.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Winnett, "Daughters of Allah," 119.

definitely Arabic."¹⁴ Noldeke includes Manat under the root form M N N, stating her origin to be a personification of the abstract ideas, Fate or Time, from out of which she was raised "to the dignity of a real goddess."¹⁵ Hommel writes simply of her, "the goddess of death Manat."¹⁶ Finally, Grunebaum says "in Arabic Manat is the linguistic counterpart of Hellenistic Tyche, Dahr, fateful 'Time' who snatches men away and robs their existence of purpose and value."¹⁷

The other root form from which Manat may be derived is M N Y.¹⁸ Words in the Qur'an which come from this root are mani, meaning a sperm-drop; umniyah, meaning a fancy, desire; manna, to fill with fancies, to arouse or fill with (false) desires; amna, to cast forth, to spill. Some other word derivatives of the root M N Y found outside the Qur'an are munya, meaning wish, desire, object of desire; tamniya, emission, ejaculation of the sperm. Because of the unmistakably sexual nature of these word derivatives, it can be reasonably argued that the goddess Manat, assuming that her name originated from the root M N Y, was at some point revered as a goddess of sexuality or fertility. The

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 1917 ed., s.v. "Arabs (Ancient)," by Th. Noldeke.

¹⁶The Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913 ed., s.v. "Arabia," by F. Hommel.

¹⁷G.E. Von Grunebaum, Classical Islam: A History (600-1258), trans. Katherine Watson (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970), 24.

¹⁸Kassis, A Concordance to the Koran.

greatest problem is, of course, a lack of information on which to base any positive conclusions concerning her origins.

Returning to the Qur'an (Sura 53.19-21), more can be said about the goddesses based on an interpretation of this verse. Buhl attributes the expression "Manat, the third, the other"¹⁹ to style, i.e., it was used simply for the rhyme. He adds that the wording implies the subordinate position of Manat which could be substantiated by the fact that Allat and al-Uzza sometimes appear alone; for example, one inscription reads, "By Allat and al-Uzza and those who in them believe, and by Allah verily he is greater than both."²⁰

The description of Manat "the third, the other" is commented on by Suyuti²¹. He writes that "other" is used pejoratively; the three goddesses were merely statues of stone, used by unbelievers for purposes of worship, claiming that they interceded for them with God. The implication of the verse, he says, is to raise the question "do these statues have any power whatsoever such as God Almighty?" when the unbelievers also claimed that these goddesses were the Daughters of Allah in spite of their hatred for daughters. Suyuti, then, is questioning the logic and credibility of the pagans, existing as they did in a culture that hated daughters, who could yet ascribe to them power. He is ridiculing the notion that Allah would have chosen

¹⁹Buhl, "Manat".

²⁰Ibn al-Kalbi, Book of Idols, 15.

²¹Tafsir al-Jalalayn.

daughters rather than sons.

This hatred for daughters, while it might have been true of the Arab in his immediate family situation, would not necessarily extend to the realm of deities. W.R. Smith²² points out that originally the relationship between a tribe and its deity was one of motherhood, not fatherhood i.e., where the deity represented a parent-figure, a goddess not a god was the object of worship. Further, he says, "the emotional side of Semitic heathenism was always very much connected with the worship of female deities."²³ Hitti²⁴ supports this argument acknowledging that Arabian goddesses preceded the god as object of worship due to the original matriarchal organization of the family.

It would seem, then, that the pagan Arabs' attitude towards daughters would not reflect their attitude toward the goddesses known as the Daughters of Allah. In Watts opinion, the term 'Daughters' was not widespread or much in use and was most probably used by those who "insisted on the superiority of the 'high god'"²⁵. It can even be questioned whether the Arabs knew these goddesses as 'Daughters', or if that is a later term of reference. Watt comments on the term 'daughters' in his article:

²²W.Robertson Smith, Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, Burnett Lectures 1888-89, The Fundamental Institutions, First Series, new ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1914),52.

²³Ibid., 59.

²⁴Hitti, History of the Arabs,100.

²⁵W.Montgomery Watt, "Pre-Islamic Arabian Religion," Islamic Studies vol.15 (1976):78.

"the numerous Qur'anic references, explicit or implicit, to 'daughters of God' are probably to be understood in relation to this belief in a 'high god'"²⁶; "this belief in a 'high god'" refers to his immediately preceding paragraph where he is discussing his theory that the Arabs of Muhammad's time still retained the vestiges of a polytheistic belief in which Allah, the 'high god', remote and superior, is nevertheless one of many gods. So, while men prayed to Allah in times of stress, they also frequently appealed to the other deities to intercede for them. For example, Sura 39.3 reads: "Those who take patrons apart from Him (say), we worship them only so that they may bring us to a near relationship with God." It is in this relation to a 'high god', then, that Watt says the term 'daughters' is to be understood. By avoiding the 'emotional' aspect of the word, as well, he is putting emphasis on the fact that the phrase "Daughters of Allah" is not to be understood in terms of Greek mythology (i.e., implying sexuality). The "Daughters" merely represented a position subordinate to that of the High God Allah. In support of this, Watt cites Sura 6.100 "and they impute to Him sons and daughters without any knowledge." Clearly the objection to daughters is not an objection to females as such, but to anyone who is associated with God.

Relevant to this discussion of the relationship between the goddesses and their worshippers is the abrogated Qur'anic verse

²⁶Ibid., 77-78.

originally sent down to Muhammad:

"Have you considered El-Lat and El-Uzza and Manat the third, the other?

Verily they are the most exalted females whose intercession is to be sought."²⁷

In light of this statement, there is little doubt as to the importance of the goddesses in the eyes of their patrons. The fact that they were females in no way diminished the veneration bestowed on them. Likewise, in view of their near acceptance into Islam, it is to be expected that the subsequent attack against the Daughters would be especially strong. Again, the attack is not so much directed against females, as to associates of God.

Continuing on to lines 22 and 23 of Sura 53, the goddesses are referred to as 'names' invented by man. Man follows surmise and his soul's desire. Izutsu comments on the Arabic word "zann" which is used to translate surmise and which he defines as "a groundless, unwarranted type of thinking, uncertain or doubtful knowledge, unreliable opinion, or mere conjecture."²⁸ In the Qur'an, 'zann' (i.e., surmise) is a negative value word used in contrast to 'ilm', i.e., knowledge "established unshakably on the basis of reality."²⁹ Those who worship the Daughters of Allah,

²⁷Ibn al-Kalbi, Book of Idols, 17.

²⁸Toshihiko Izutsu, Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an, McGill Islamic Studies, I, ed. Charles J. Adams and John A. Williams (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), 132.

²⁹Ibid.

then, have little on which to base their faith ... inferior thinking urged on by their soul's desire. This same idea is repeated in lines 28 and 29 (Sura 53). The unbelievers give the angels female names because "they have not any Knowledge", (ilm); they follow instead surmise (zann), which can only be understood as an absence of real knowledge, "and surmise avails naught against truth."

Other implicit references to the Daughters are the many references to "associates": "and yet they ascribe to God associates", "when the idolaters behold their association", "show me those you have joined to Him as associates".³⁰ Apparently,

the Daughters of Allah were sometimes called the 'companions' or even 'associates' of God³¹. The word 'shirk' is used to describe this belief in 'associates' and is attributed to the workings of that mental process known as 'zann'. One who ascribes associates to God (mushrik) is therefore operating under serious misconceptions and can never realize the Truth.

The very prevalence of verses disclaiming associates of God, however, speaks of the persistence with which the ancient Arabs clung to their old ways. In a country where change comes so slowly, traditional tribal values would be so deeply ingrained into the very souls of the pagan Arabs that Muhammad's call to "surrender" would be naturally resisted. As the people of Ad said in reply to the "warners": "what, hast thou come to pervert

³⁰Suras 13.33; 16.86; 34.27.

³¹Izutsu, Concepts in the Qur'an, 130.

us from our gods?"³²

³²Sura 46.20.

CHAPTER TWO

AN EXAMINATION OF OTHER ARABIC SOURCES

Ibn al-Kalbi, a prominent scholar of the eighth century, and who is especially remembered for his recordings of pre-Islamic paganism in his book Kitab al-Asnam (Book of Idols), is the first of our Arabic sources. He records that Manat was the most ancient of the three goddesses. Her sanctuary was located in Qudayd on the caravan road between Medina and Mecca. Aside from the people of Mecca and Medina, she was most venerated by the members of the Aws and the Khazraj tribes. He speaks of a pilgrimage that the Aws and the Khazraj (as well as other Arabs) went on where they "observed the vigil at all the appointed places"³³ but did not shave their heads. When the pilgrimage had ended, they visited Manat's sanctuary where they shaved their heads. This last act of veneration marked the completion of the pilgrimage as well as reaffirmed the high regard in which the goddess was held. Kalbi also mentions two swords which had been presented to Manat by the king of Ghassan. Not only is this further evidence of the prestige of this goddess, but, as well, is indicative of the extensive nature of her worship. Manat was worshipped by the Arabs until her idol was destroyed by Ali on

³³Ibn al-Kalbi, Book of Idols, 12-13.

command of the Prophet.

Concerning Allat, she apparently 'stood' in al-Taif where the banu-Attab ibn-Malik of the Thaqif tribe watched over her. The Quraysh "as well as all Arabs"³⁴ worshipped her. When the Thaqif turned to Islam, the idol of Allat was destroyed and her temple burned to the ground. Kalbi hints at the resistance of the Thaqif towards the destruction of Allat by alluding to a warning given to the Thaqif, "not to return to her worship nor attempt to avenge her destruction."³⁵

Al-Uzza is described as the youngest or most recent of the three goddesses for the reason that Allat and Manat-names of children appeared before Uzza-names. Her idol was located in a valley in Nakhlāt, known as Hurad, on the road from Mecca to Iraq. According to Kalbi, Uzza was first brought here by Zalim ibn-As'ad although there is no mention of her original location. Zalim built a house for her where apparently the people would come to receive oracular communications. Her custody was in the hands of the banu-Shayban ibn-Jabir ibn-Murrah ibn-Abs ibn-Rifa ah ibn-al-Harith ibn-Utbah ibn-Sulaym ibn-Manusr of the banu-Sulaym. Although the Quraysh worshipped Allat and Manat, they venerated al-Uzza more than any other idol, offering gifts and sacrifices for her favors. Muhammad himself is said to have sacrificed a white sheep to al-Uzza as was the customary practice

³⁴Ibid.,14.

³⁵Ibid.,15.

of his people.³⁶

Al-Ghabghab was another place of sacrifice associated with Uzza. One inscription reads:

"We swore first by the House of God,
And failing that, by the baetyls which in
al-Ghabghab stand."³⁷

This oath is interesting not only for its mention of al-Ghabghab, but for the position al-Ghabghab has in respect to the 'House of God' (Allah). It implies a subordinate relationship between Allah and Uzza which could have resulted in the term 'daughter' of Allah; as well, it is an example of the role of intercessor with which the goddesses are attributed and which supposedly was one of their primary functions in Mecca.

Because of the exemplary position in which al-Uzza was held, Muhammad dispatched his senior general, Khalid ibn-al Walid to cut down her sacred trees in the valley of Naklah. In his account Kalbi describes an episode wherein Khalid confronts al-Uzza, "an Abyssinian woman with dishevelled hair and her hands placed on her shoulders, gnashing and grating her teeth"; he slays her saying "O al-Uzza. May thou be blasphemed, not exalted."³⁸

Epigraphy is the second and probably most valuable Arabic source of information leading to the identification of the three

³⁶Ibid.,16-17.

³⁷Ibid.,19.

³⁸Ibid.,22.

Arabian goddesses. From an examination of the inscriptional remains of ancient centers, certain assumptions can be made about the religion of the pagan Arabs, in particular, of course, about the Daughters of Allah. In the south, the discovery of Sabaeen inscriptions mentioning al-Uzza and Allat indicate these goddesses were known there. However, judging from the relatively late dates of these inscriptions, Winnett proposes that neither goddess was indigenous to this region but had her origins in the north (Sinai and Syria respectively)³⁹. Otherwise, he points out, they would surely have been mentioned in the early texts. The Sabaeen inscriptions which he cites date mostly from the Hamdanid period (later than A.D. 250), although there were a few Minaean references dating to the fourth century B.C. Because these Minaean references were found in trading colonies established in the north, however, Winnett concludes that it was from here the South Arabians made initial contact with the goddesses. From the north then, Winnett argues, the cults of the goddesses spread southward. This theory runs contrary to that of Cooke who states, "her [Allat's] worship extended northward (from Ta'if) to Hejra, Hauran, as far as Palmyra ..."⁴⁰ It would seem from this that Cooke believed that Allat, for one, originated in the vicinity of Mecca, as if Kalbi's account of her sanctuary there (Ta'if) was to be understood as her home. Hitti perhaps

³⁹Winnett, "Daughters of Allah," 122.

⁴⁰George Albert Cooke, A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions: Maobite, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Jewish, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1903), 222._

supports Winnett's suggestion that Allat came from the north (although not Syria) for he describes her as, "The North Arabian al-Lat, who figures in the Koran"⁴¹

Whether the goddess Manat was known in South Arabia is not easily deduced from the inscriptions. Winnett intimates that Manat was worshipped in South Arabia alongside of Gadd, Fortune⁴², thus implying that Manat was associated with this god. If Manat represented the conception of Destiny, Fate, and accompanied Gadd, she might be understood in some of the names such as GDN'M or N'MGD⁴³, appealed to by South Arabian women in times of childbirth and sickness. This theory, accordingly, hinges on the assumption that Manat was the Arabian version of the Near Eastern Gadd or Tyche, a theory which seems to have considerable consensus. The difficulty in knowing the true identity of Manat, is that, by and large, inscriptions naming her do no more than testify to her presence; they do not elaborate as to the capacity in which she was worshipped.

In North Western Arabia, at the ancient site of Dedan (modern al-Ula), epigraphical discoveries have determined the existence there of the Daughters of Allah. Dedan was originally an outpost established by the South Arabian merchants in the

⁴¹Hitti, History of the Arabs, 61.

⁴²Just as in Canaan where Meni and Gad were associated, Manat may have likewise been associated with Gad(d) in Arabia.

⁴³F.V.Winnett and W.L.Reed, Ancient Records from North Arabia (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 115.

interest of their trade venture, that became an important centre of commercial contacts. Winnett remarks on it: "the large number of inscriptions to be found in and around the oasis testifies to the important role which Dedan (al-Ula) played in the commercial and cultural life in ancient Arabia."⁴⁴ The Minaeans of South Arabia settled here sometime around the seventh century B.C. for the purpose of protecting and controlling the frankincense-bearing caravans, passing enroute from al-Yemen to the Mediterranean ports. Competing with the Minaeans for control of this lucrative enterprise were the Lihyanites, a northern tribe from Agar (Hagar) on the Gulf of Aqaba. This tribe succeeded in ousting the Minaeans from Dedan, and maintained control here from 500 - 300 B.C.

All three Daughters were attested to at Dedan according to Winnett. Allat is invoked in at least one inscription, and a priest of Allat appears in one as well: "This is Alim the priest of Allat."⁴⁵ Manat is mentioned also in inscriptions and appears in name formations. One such name formation is considered by Winnett to be the earliest reference to this goddess. Possibly influenced by this, he gives the original home of Manat to be in the vicinity of Dedan⁴⁶. Finally, the goddess al-Uzza, who until now had not been confirmed here, has been positively identified on the basis of some discovery having to do with the definite

⁴⁴Ibid., 114.

⁴⁵Winnett, "Daughters of Allah," 126; 116.

⁴⁶Ibid., 128.

article 'han'.⁴⁷

Having uncovered al-Uzza in the Lihyanite inscriptions, Winnett challenges Kalbi's statement that she was more recent than Allat and Manat. The South Arabians knew her as 'Uzzayan, the Lihyanites as han-'Uzza, and the Nabataeans as 'Uzzaya and al-'Uzza which argues the consolidation of her position in Arabia.⁴⁸ On the basis of these discoveries, Winnett seems justified in his conclusion that "the worship of Allah and his three daughters was flourishing in Arabia ..."⁴⁹

One other feature of the Lihyanite inscriptions at Dedan is the mention there of the Canaanite gods Baal Samin and El. Evidence of the god El, for example, is found in the name of a king of Dedan, Kabir'el, son of Mati'el⁵⁰. That they were known here is but one of many instances that illustrate their active presence in Arabia, theirs, as well as other Canaanite deities who were worshipped alongside of native gods. The importation and adoption of these foreign deities was undoubtedly a by-product of the extensive trading between those Arabian cities situated on the caravan highways and the cities of the Near East. We have a good authority for the direct communication between Dedan and Tyre, for example, in the Bible: "Dedan traded with you

⁴⁷Ibid., 116.

⁴⁸Ibid., 116.

⁴⁹Ibid., 116.

⁵⁰New Catholic Encyclopaedia, 1967ed., s.v. "Arabia," by J. Starcky.

[Tyre] in saddlecloths for riding. Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your favored dealers in lambs, rams, and goats; in these they trafficked with you."⁵¹

The Sinaitic inscriptions from the Northwestern corner of Arabia are valuable for what they tell us about the cult of the planet Venus, presumably the cult of the goddess al-Uzza. Winnett, for one, believes the Sinai to be her place of origin: "The form of her name, with the article al, would suggest that."⁵² He refers to Jerome's Life of St. Hilarion in which the latter mentions a celebration at the temple of Venus in Elusa, and proposes that the name Elusa is a Latin transcription of the Arabic al-Uzza; this being her home, then, the annual festival there in honor of Venus must have been in honor of al-Uzza. Winnett also draws on Herodotus for corroboration of his theory. In Book I.105 Herodotus⁵³ states that the oldest centre of worship of the goddess Aphrodite (i.e., Astarte/Venus) was at Askalon. If the goddess worshipped here by the Arabs was al-Uzza, it follows that the goddess to whom Herodotus referred when he said that the Arabs of Sinai worshipped 'Alilat ("the goddess"), is likelier to have been al-Uzza than Allat.

Two Sinaitic inscriptions have been found that refer to a priest of al-Uzza, and another one that bears the title Abd al-

⁵¹Ezekiel 27.20.

⁵²Winnett, "Daughters of Allah," 122.

⁵³Herodotus, The Histories, trans. Aubrey de Setincourt, revised with an introduction and notes by A.R. Burn (Great Britain: Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press), Ltd., 1981).

Uzza, a name that prior to Islam was "extremely common among the Arabs."⁵⁴ There is also an account given by Nilus that describes sacrifices by wild Arabs to the morning star, not far from the district where the inscriptions were found.

Stepping outside of Arabia proper, momentarily, there is another region where mention is made of the Arabian goddesses. This is the region southeast of Damascus known as Safa; the Safaitic inscriptions, as they are referred to, date approximately from the first century B.C. Because the Safaites were in such close proximity to the Greco-Romans, the deities mentioned in the inscriptions were often Hellenized. For example, Allat, the deity most frequently invoked, was assimilated with Astarte, Aphrodite and Athena. According to Winnett, only two goddesses were mentioned, Allat and Rudaw, Rudaw being "the Thamudic and Safaitic equivalent of al-Uzza."⁵⁵ Manat may have been present here as well as the Gadd of one of the tribes. As was common among the Syrian tribes, the tribes of the Safaites had fortune-deities, or tyches, who protected them. Because Manat was already known in this capacity in Arabia, it is possible she was understood as being one of the Gadds (Tyche) here; as an example, the tribe Dayf is represented by Jadd (Gadd)-Dayf. The Gadd is left unidentified as was a common practice. Unfortunately, while the name Manat is recorded in the Palmyrene, the Safaitic inscriptions do not mention her and

⁵⁴Noldeke, "Arabs (Ancient)".

⁵⁵Winnett, "Daughters of Allah," 123.

therefore her presence cannot be definitely ascertained.

While the Safaitic inscriptions are inconclusive, their value lies in their testimonial of the worship of the Arabian goddesses outside of Arabia, an observation which Oxtoby recognized when he said, "The Safaitic pantheon includes deities known from the Nabataean and Palmyrene texts as well as South Arabian, thus attesting a certain unity of cultus in Arabia and the Syrian desert."⁵⁶ Other than what has been said, there is little else to be gained from the inscriptions concerning the identity or function of the Daughters. However, the fact that these Arabian goddesses were so widely worshipped is further evidence of their popularity prior to the rise of Islam.

⁵⁶Willard Gurdon Oxtoby, Some Inscriptions of the Safaitic Bedouin, American Oriental Series, vol.50, ed.Ernest Bender et al. (New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Society, 1968),21.

CHAPTER THREE

A GEOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

It is possible that what we know about the Daughters of Allah might be supplemented by an examination of their counterparts both in Arabia and in the adjacent regions. Because it is the underlying assumption of this thesis that Arabian religious life was significantly influenced by the religions of the surrounding territories, transmitted via the caravan trade, it follows that the Daughters of Allah must have been influenced by the deities of those territories. This chapter will highlight a few of those deities, an understanding of whom might contribute to our knowledge of the Arabian goddesses.

Beginning in the south, most scholars⁵⁷ agree that the religion there was of an astral nature consisting of the moon god (Wadd, Sin, 'Amm, Hawbas), his consort the sun goddess (Shams), and the god who represented Venus (Athtar). In regard to this religious system Jamme comments, "The astral character of the three main divinities must be seen as connected with the importance of the stars to communities whose wealth depended to a

⁵⁷Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 60; Lewis Bayles Paton, "Ishtar" in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1915ed; A. Jamme, "Arabia" in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 1967ed.

large extent on the caravan trade."⁵⁸ Of special interest is the god 'Athtar who would appear to be the male counterpart in the south of the goddess al-Uzza in the north. His identity warrants a closer investigation.

According to Paton, the name 'Athtar is the South Arabian form of the name that appears as 'Ashtart (Astarte) in Canaan, Ishtar in Babylonia and Assyria, 'Ashtar in Moab, and 'Astar in Abyssinia: "The phonetic relation of these various forms shows that 'Athtar (Ashtart, Astarte) was a primitive Semitic deity who must have been worshipped by the Aramaeans from the earliest times."⁵⁹ The first known mention of the name is from the Annals of Ashurbanipal in the form 'Atar-Samain, "heavenly 'Atar". Teixidor identifies 'Atar-Samain ("morning star of heaven")⁶⁰ with a deity of uncertain gender whose cult was widespread in North Arabia, despite its absence in the inscriptions. Winckler, in conclusion to his study of the Annals of Ashurbanipal, states that Atar Samain, in his opinion, was equated with the Assyrian goddess Ishtar.⁶¹ In agreement with this is Starcky who says, "Atar-samain...is the god 'Athtar of

⁵⁸New Catholic Encyclopaedia, 1967ed., s.v. "Arabia" by A. Jamme; presumably, the caravans travelled by night and relied on the stars and planets to guide them.

⁵⁹Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 1918ed., s.v. "Atargatis," by Lewis Bayles Paton.

⁶⁰Javier Teixidor, The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 68.

⁶¹Paton, "Atargatis"; Paton is citing Winckler (Altorient. Forsch. i 528).

Ugarit (15th century) and of the southern Arabs. But here [Annals of Esarhaddon, 680-669] it is a goddess, like the Babylonian Ishtar and the Phoenician Astarte..."⁶²

There is confusion as to the gender of 'Atar ('Athtar). In South Arabia and Moab it is masculine; in Canaan, Babylonia, Assyria, Phoenicia, and possibly North Arabia it is feminine. Judging from its earliest use, this deity was possibly both male and female, androgynous. For example, although Ishtar was a renowned goddess, Queen of the gods, there are Akkadian texts that infer she was androgynous. The Ras Shamra texts of Ugarit record two personal names of 'Attar: 'ttr ab, "Attar is father", and 'ttr um, "Attar is mother".⁶³ Also, in South Arabia a Sabaeen inscription refers to 'Athtar as "the mistress, mother-'Athtar"⁶⁴, and describes him (her?) as the giver of children.

One reasonable hypothesis concerning this confusion is that, because of the type of worship surrounding the planet Venus, i.e., its dual aspect of morning and evening star, the ancient Arabs conceivably represented this dual nature in the form of an androgynous deity. Thus the morning star represented the god, the evening star the goddess, or vice-versa. In South Arabia the

⁶²New Catholic Encyclopaedia, 1967ed., s.v. "Arabia," by J. Starcky.

⁶³Mitchell J. Dahood, "Ancient Semitic Deities in Syria and Palestine," Studi Semitica (Rome), 1 (1958):87.

⁶⁴Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 1918ed., s.v. "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte," by Lewis Bayles Paton.

morning star was male, 'Atar Sarigan, "the Eastern 'Attar"⁶⁵, and was represented as a warrior god; the evening star, while not specifically known to be female, was the deity of fertility, of life-giving water,⁶⁶ characteristics of the female deities of the north such as Atargatis and Astarte. In any case, this dual nature of the Venus deity will be discussed further in reference to the goddess al-Uzza in chapter five.

Whether as a male or female, the primitive Semitic deity 'Athtar seems to have been represented throughout ancient Near Eastern civilizations... in Canaan, Phoenicia, Assyria/Babylonia, and in South Arabia. In the Ugaritic texts he plays a rather insignificant role as the son of Asherah. Upon the defeat of Baal, god of the sky, Asherah appoints her son 'Athtar to take his place. However, 'Athtar was too small for the throne, his feet did not reach the footstool nor his head the top. Albright⁶⁷ interprets the rejection of 'Athtar from Baal's throne as an indication of the rivalry between the cults of Baal and 'Athtar in Canaan from the very earliest of times, even before the middle of the second millennium. Hostility between the two gods would suggest 'Athtar was once a serious threat to the cult of Baal and that he once held a position of some strength in

⁶⁵H.J.W.Drijvers, Cults and Beliefs at Edessa, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1980),151.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷F.W.Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan:A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths, the Jordan Lectures, 1965 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1968),232.

Canaan.

Caquot and Sznycer suggest that the inadequacy of 'Athtar as opposed to Baal in the myth was a sign that, in the eyes of the Northern Semites, 'Athtar was a "fallen god".⁶⁸ They mention various theories that cast him as a primitive but great god of heaven, god of the desert, or an astral god who subsequently fell into decline. Unfortunately, no reasons are offered for the fall of 'Athtar in Canaan. Possibly the failure of 'Athtar to replace Baal was allegorical for the inadequacy of artificial irrigation as opposed to natural rainfall.⁶⁹ The root 'tr from which the name 'Athtar is derived is connected in Arabic with artificial irrigation, hence, 'Athtar's inherent disadvantage in the face of Baal who was the Lord of the Sky and the rains. Smith, on the other hand, endeavours to show that the words ba'l and 'athari, "belonging to 'Athtar"⁷⁰, are synonymous for land that is naturally fertile, i.e., underground water as opposed to land dependent on rain or artificial irrigation. He writes: "The best Arabian authorities say expressly that ba'l palm trees are such as drink by their roots, without artificial irrigation and without rain..."⁷¹ In Arabia, then, both Baal and 'Athtar were

⁶⁸Andre Caquot and Maurice Sznycer, Ugaritic Religion, Iconography of Religions, XV,8 (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1980),15.

⁶⁹Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971ed. s.v. "Baal Worship," by Marvin Pope.

⁷⁰Smith, Religion of the Semites,98-99.

⁷¹Ibid.99; Hitti, as well describes the deity Ba'l as "the spirit of springs and underground water..." History of the Arabs, 97.

gods of underground irrigation. Smith then poses the question: which is the real Baal? Was he originally an Arabian god of subterranean water who later became the god of rain; or did he enter Arabia as the lord of rain and was adapted to suit its special climatic conditions? Wellhausen and Noldeke hold that Baal-worship was indigenous to Arabia, "older than the Semitic dispersion, and to belong to an age when all the Semites were still nomadic."⁷² Smith⁷³, on the contrary, believes Baal is not indigenous to Arabia but entered that country with the date-palm. But even so, he admits its very unlikely Baal entered as a god of the rains who changed to a god of underground springs. Rather, because the date-palm relies on subterranean water and not on rainfall for utmost productivity, Baal was regarded originally as the god of underground water supply. Semitic agriculture (i.e., the date-palm primarily), he says, existed at oasis and springs and not in places of abundant or dependable rainfall.

Whatever the case may be, it is clearly apparent that the gods Baal and 'Athtar were fertility gods worshipped alongside of each other throughout the ancient Near East from South Arabia to the land of Canaan. For unknown reasons, but which very probably related to agricultural changes, 'Athtar's position diminished in Canaan to be superceded altogether by Baal. 'Athtar was

⁷²Smith, Religion of the Semites, 100; Smith is citing J. Wellhausen and Th. Noldeke.

⁷³Ibid. 101.

subsequently important only in South Arabia and then

predominantly as an astral god, Venus. Interestingly, Astarte, his female counterpart in Canaan, although initially colourless and unimportant in the Ugaritic myths, went on to become the Semitic goddess of fertility and sexuality, par excellence. This goddess will be dealt with in greater detail in chapter six; it is enough here to draw attention to the connection between the two.

There are further indications in South Arabia of foreign influence or, rather, of the commonality of religious life in the ancient Near East, in the presence of the Canaanite mother-goddess Asherah. According to Hommel⁷⁴, in South Arabia, like in Canaan, Asherah was a great mother-goddess, mother and consort of the moon god. Considering that the moon god was the head of the astral triad, her relationship with him parallels that with El, the ancestral deity in Canaan. Hommel further identifies Asherah with Ilat "as a component part in names of persons, also in the shortened form Lat."⁷⁵ This is not the first time Allat was said to represent the mother-goddess, as will become evident, so her identification with Asherah is not unreasonable. The role of the mother-goddess must have been an important one, not only in Canaanite religion, but in the religions of all primitive Semites where the female deity reflected the matriarchal type of society, as Smith and others have pointed out.

⁷⁴Hommel, "Arabia,".

⁷⁵Ibid.

The prosperity of South Arabia was heavily dependent on the caravan trade originating in the Yemen and moving northwards to the Mediterranean world. When, however, the Romans intervened on this monopoly by sending their own ships to India for purposes of trade, the economy of the south went into decline causing the important cultural centers to shift from the Yemen to the Hijaz.⁷⁶ The communities of the Hijaz now attracted the attention of the outside world, and, experiencing an influx of foreigners, took on a cosmopolitan character: "Al-Hijaz, through its somewhat central position, its accessibility and its location on the main caravan route running north and south, offered an unexcelled opportunity for both religious and commercial activity."⁷⁷

In the southern Hijaz there were two cities of note, Mecca and al-Taif, as well as the nearby cult centers of Naklah and Qudayd. These important religious sites have been previously discussed in connection with the Daughters of Allah in chapter one and therefore need not be included here. It might be worth mentioning at this time, however, that the economic boom of this area together with its expanding urban population may have been

⁷⁶This decline in South Arabian trade was not a sudden one but "age-long", brought on by many factors, Roman intervention being one; Hitti, History of the Arabs, 65. O'Leary, discussing this point, observes, "When the Red Sea shipping declined, the Hijaz route revived and then Mecca and Yathrib (Medina) began to rise into importance." De Lacy O'Leary, Arabia Before Muhammad, reprinted from the 1927ed., London (New York, N.Y.: AMS Press Inc., 1973), 105.

⁷⁷Hitti, History of the Arabs, 102.

responsible for the development of permanent sanctuaries for the goddesses Allat, al-Uzza, and Manat, so that the Hijaz became identified as their home. This assumption, which seems implicit in Kalbi's book, might be misleading, as Winnett argues.⁷⁸

In northern Hijaz was the important settlement of Teima (Tayma). Here, caravans from the south enroute to Egypt or Assyria would stop, in order to take advantage of its bountiful spring and to renew necessary provisions. Teima, to which O'Leary refers as "the great distributing centre for all Arabia"⁷⁹ was a particularly active commercial centre having connections with Egypt and Palestine via Aqaba (Elath) and Sinai, with Babylonia via Ha'il, and with Syria via Petra. One would expect to find in such an international trading centre, a heterogeneous population, the differing elements of which being represented by corresponding deities. From inscriptions discovered on Jabal Ghunaym (ten miles southeast of Teima) dating about the sixth century B.C.⁸⁰, it is apparent that the Canaanite goddess Asherah was especially revered in this area. One inscription that names her reads: "...in the 22nd year...in Tema, Salm of Mahran and Shingala and Ashira, the gods of Tema..."⁸¹ Cooke thinks the god Salm is Aramaic or North Semitic, "not

⁷⁸Winnett, "Daughters of Allah".

⁷⁹O'Leary, Arabia Before Muhammad, 105.

⁸⁰Winnett, Ancient Records from North Arabia, 29.

⁸¹Cooke, Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions, 196.

native to Arabia"⁸²; and Asherah is certainly not native which means that none of "the gods of Tema" were Arabian but, rather, of foreign import. Their position in the community, however, is a reflection of the close ties between Teima and the eastern Mediterranean regions.

Unfortunately, due to the extreme scarcity of epigraphical or literary evidence, the capacity in which the goddess Asherah was worshipped remains unknown. Nevertheless, because she was widely venerated as a mother-goddess/fertility goddess in Ugarit, in Canaan and South Arabia, it is reasonable to suppose that here, at Teima, she served in the same capacity. If she was thus worshipped in northern Arabia, it is possible that Allat, so well-known in the north, assumed these characteristics as well, if she were not originally regarded in this manner. If Allat was worshipped at Teima, for which, curiously, there is yet no evidence,⁸³ her cult would very likely have incorporated these more prominent characteristics of Asherah's.

There are indications from Teima that the religion in the north was of an astral nature as in the south. The Babylonians and Assyrians, who are known from the Assyrian annals to have infiltrated Arabia on many occasions, could have passed on their

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³There is a stone plaque found on Jabal Ghunaym that depicts a goddess with protruding breasts seated on a chair whose legs resemble the claws of a lion. Winnett considers this goddess might be Allat, being "one of the most popular goddesses in ancient North Arabia", or Asherah who was known at Teima. Winnett, Ancient Records from North Arabia, 170.

astral religion to the Arabians as some scholars have suggested.⁸⁴ Babylonia, and "colonies of Babylonians"⁸⁵ settled in Teima for ten years during which time Babylonian influence must have been exerted on the indigenous population. A sun god was worshipped here, judging from the evidence of the famous Teima Stone, and possibly a moon god. There is an inscription that mentions 'Athtar, the Venus god of South Arabia: "By Bi 'Athtar the son of Jilf..."⁸⁶ According to Winnett, "Bi 'Athtar occurs frequently as a n. pr. in Sabaean...; it can only be interpreted as 'son of 'Athtar'".⁸⁷ From this, it would appear that 'Athtar was brought here by the tribes migrating from the south and was, subsequently, worshipped at Teima as Venus.

It has been mentioned earlier (Assyrian Annals) that the god/goddess Atar-samain was known in North Arabia, perhaps well-known as Teixidor suggests: "Atarsamain's cult was widespread among the tribes of North Arabia..."⁸⁸ There have been proposals that Atar-samain was identified with Allat. We know from the Assyrian Annals that Atar-samain was recognized as an important Arabian deity: "I repaired the damages of the images of

⁸⁴De Lacy O'Leary, Arabia Before Muhammad, 193; Giorgio Levi Della Vida, "Pre-Islamic Arabia," in The Arab Heritage, ed. Nabih Amin Faris (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1963), 52.

⁸⁵Teixidor, The Pagan God, 71.

⁸⁶F.V. Winnett, Study of the Lihyanite and Thamudic Inscriptions (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1937), 23.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Teixidor, Pagan God, 68.

Atarsamain, Dai, Nuhai, Ruldaiu, Abirillu (and of) Atarquruma, the gods of the Arabs."⁸⁹ It is certainly possible that Allat (al-ilat, the goddess) was an epithet of Atar-samain and in time came to represent an individual deity. This would account for the absence of Atar-samain in the inscriptions of the north. Paton is one who believes Atar-samain was disguised under the names of her epithets: "In North Arabia the original name of the goddess was displaced by titles such as al-Lat, 'the goddess', or al-Uzza, 'the strong'..."⁹⁰, and he refers to Wellhausen who has made similar proposals. The idea that an inter-relationship exists amongst these deities, not only in Arabia but throughout the ancient Near East, has considerable merit. Its potential as a means of identifying the Daughters of Allah will be examined in the Conclusion.

A final and brief mention must be made of the ancient site of Elath (modern Aqaba) located at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. Elath was another strategic point along the caravan highway from where merchandise was transferred into Palestine, Egypt, and Syria. While Elath was undoubtedly an important trade centre, there is no information concerning its religious life. However, its very name is suggestive as far as our topic is concerned. Elath is the ancient name of the Canaanite mother-goddess, before the name Asherah was used. Her name is the feminine form of El,

⁸⁹Ibid., 66.

⁹⁰Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 1915ed. s.v. "Ishtar," by Lewis Bayles Paton.

the ancient Semitic deity.⁹¹ In Canaanite mythology they were the original divine couple.

There is speculation that Allah, the Arabian god, was "the direct continuator of the common Semitic deity El..."⁹² If Allah in Arabia is synonymous with El in Palestine, then Allat could reasonably be the counterpart of Elath. There is a Nabataean inscription from the Hauran which O'Leary translates as, "priest of Ellath"⁹³, and Cooke as "priest of Allath"⁹⁴. Can one infer from this that these two names are proto-Semitic cognates and, therefore, can be used interchangeably? Another inscription from Sardinia is translated by Cooke, "to build this sanctuary to the lady Elath."⁹⁵ In his commentary, however, he offers the alternative names "Ilat" and "Allat".

Assuming the Canaanite background of the trade centre Elath, it is not difficult to imagine that the Arabian inhabitants there came to worship their native Allat in place of Elath (their names being nearly identical), transferring not only the name but the characteristics as well. Given the commonality of cultures and

⁹¹Della Vida interprets El as "the general word for 'god' or 'the divine'"; this deity would correspond to Kronos of Greek mythology. "Pre-Islamic Arabia" in The Arab Heritage, by Giorgio Levi Della Vida, ed. Nabih Amin Faris, 52.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³O'Leary, Arabia Before Muhammad, 194.

⁹⁴Cooke, Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions, 252.

⁹⁵Ibid. 158.

language,⁹⁶ the assimilation seems natural enough.

As the most revered goddess of the north, Allat, then, was most likely worshipped at Elath (hence the subsequent confusion of the names), and in the capacity, among others, of mother-goddess. The contribution of Canaanite religion, not only in Elath but through most of Arabia, is an important factor in the identity of the Daughters of Allah, as is, of course, the influence of Babylonia and Syria. The application of this information will be summarized in the conclusion.

⁹⁶"...the Assyro-Babylonian, Aramaic, Hebrew, Phoenician, South Arabic, Ethiopic, and Arabic languages should be viewed as dialects developing out of one common tongue..." Hitti, History of the Arabs, 13.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NABATAEANS

There is a section of North Arabia that deserves independent attention. This is the kingdom of the Nabataeans, a powerful North Arabian tribe and possessors of a vast kingdom. They were the successors of the Edomites, in the region from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Moabites and Ammonites in Transjordan. Their possessions included Petra, Bostra, Gerash and, for awhile, Damascus; in addition, this vast kingdom extended far to the south, from where they are thought to have originated. Petra, their capital city, was an important trading centre on the caravan highway from South Arabia. It provided a vital service to the traders enroute from the south, supplying them with fresh relays of camels as well as precious water. The Nabataean state flourished until the first century A.D. when the trade route, so vital to the prosperity of the area, shifted eastward thereby passing Petra in favor of a new site, Palmyra. By the beginning of the first century, Arabia Petrae, as the Nabataean kingdom was known, was in a state of collapse and already under the foot of the encroaching Roman Empire.

From the inscriptions, it is apparent that the Nabataeans, though of Arab race, used the Aramaic script of their neighbours

to the north. Such familiarity between the Arabs and the inhabitants of surrounding territories could only have arisen out of long contact, commercial and political. Being the middlemen, so to speak, of an enterprise as crucial as the caravan trade for more than four centuries, the Nabataeans would have been well imbued with the cultures of both the Arabian traders to the south and the Hellenized Easterners with whom they were in business. While their religion was predominantly Arabian in character, not too unlike the religion of South Arabia, there was at the same time an unmistakable Hellenistic influence. For example, on coins from Petra, Allat-Manatu is represented as the City-goddess, Tyche, a very popular Greek goddess of the Hellenistic period⁹⁷.

Allat was the chief female deity of the Nabataeans. According to Hitti⁹⁸, Petra had a kind of Ka'ba in which Dushara (dhu-Shara, Lord of Shara) was worshipped in the form of a black rectangular stone, with his consort Allat. Allat was possibly worshipped here as a virgin mother (northern influence), or as a mother of the gods, in particular the mother of Dushara. Smith,⁹⁹ who supports this idea, says this conception of the goddess-mother is the oldest form of Semitic cult religion where polyandry and female kinship were predominant; he refers to the

⁹⁷George Francis Hill, Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum, ed. Arnaldo Forni, V.29 (Bologna, Italy, 1965), xxxvii.

⁹⁸Hitti, History of the Arabs, 72.

⁹⁹Smith, Religion of the Semites, 56-58.

Babylonian Ishtar as an example of this type. Noldeke, as well, writes that on a Nabataean inscription Allat is called "the mother of the gods"¹⁰⁰

Winnett¹⁰¹ does not deny the existence of a virgin-mother at Petra, but says her name was Kaaba, not Allat. In his opinion, Smith has incorrectly identified the two goddesses as one: "Smith was unduly influenced by the supposed reference to Allat as 'the mother of the gods', for which translation there is no basis in the original."¹⁰² In similar manner he dismisses the reading "Allat the mother of the gods" in reference to an inscription from Hebran, charging such an interpretation is "without any foundation".¹⁰³

Further Nabataean epigraphical evidence for Allat comes from al-Ola, al-Hegr, and from Gebel-Ramm (east of the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba) where a temple was built in her honour. In the Hauran too, at Bosra and Salhad, temples were built for her. From the temple at Salhad, there is an inscription which reads: "To Allat their goddess, who is in Salhad, and whose (cult) Rawahu son of Qasiu, the great grandfather of the Rawahu above-(mentioned) had established there...."¹⁰⁴ Teixidor believes this inscription to

¹⁰⁰Noldeke, "Arabs (Ancient)".

¹⁰¹Winnett, "Daughters of Allah".

¹⁰²Ibid., 123.

¹⁰³Ibid., 118.

¹⁰⁴Javier Teixidor, The Pantheon of Palmyra (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1979), 55.

be important on two accounts: first, it establishes the time the cult was founded which he estimates to be the year A.D.56, and which would correspond to the time when the Nabataeans occupied this region; secondly, he says the wording "to Allat their goddess who is in Salhad" indicates that the goddess was imported into this territory from somewhere "far afield".¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, Teixidor does not venture to suggest what her origins might be except to say in a later context, "this female deity of Arab origin."¹⁰⁶ So, the Arabian Allat, it would seem, was carried outside of Arabia to be worshipped in neighbouring regions. Whether her origins were Arabian, Syrian (Winnett), or other, evidence of her worship in all parts of the Arabian peninsula suggests an obvious popularity.

Noldeke and Wellhausen share the opinion that the Nabataeans worshipped Allat as the sun-goddess. The sun, Noldeke writes, is feminine in Arabic (shams) hence the suitability of Allat 'the goddess'.¹⁰⁷ In regard to Herodotus' reference to Allat as Urania, Noldeke states that one can infer only that she was celestial; "to regard it as a definite interpretation would be illegitimate."¹⁰⁸ Ryckman says both that Allat was known to the Arabs as the sun-goddess and that Ilat (the older form of Lat)

¹⁰⁵Ibid.,56.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.,57.

¹⁰⁷Noldeke, "Arabs (Ancient)".

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

was known as the goddess Venus to the Arabs of the north.¹⁰⁹

In contradiction to these viewpoints, Winnett reiterates, "The advocates of the sun-goddess theory have probably been influenced by the fact that the word for sun in Arabic, shams, is feminine."¹¹⁰ In spite of the feminine gender of the word, he points out that in North Arabia the sun was regarded as masculine. He refers to a Safaitic inscription in which Allat and Shams are distinguished, concluding that Allat could not then be the sun. As well, he argues that the Nabataean sun deity was the male god, Dushara, and in Palmyra the sun deity was likewise masculine; based on this, Winnett finds it "unlikely" that Allat would be the sun-goddess. His own theory is that Allat was in fact the moon-goddess. First, he reasons, the moon was regarded as feminine (in the Sinai), not masculine as popular opinion contends, and therefore presumes a feminine deity. In support of this, he claims the moon appears as a goddess on coins. Secondly, from excavation findings, what were thought to be Astarte figurines are reinterpreted as images of the moon-goddess: "There was no reason for providing Astarte-Venus with horns, but every reason for depicting the moon-goddess with them."¹¹¹ In addition, while the sun and Venus are worshipped by the Arabs, there is a glaring absence of a corresponding worship

¹⁰⁹G.Ryckmans, Les Religions Arabes Preislamiques, Bibliotheque Du Museon, 2nd ed.,v.26 (Louvain: Publications Universitaires and Bureaux du Museon, 1951),15.

¹¹⁰Winnett, "Daughters of Allah,"124.

¹¹¹Ibid.,125.

of the moon. In South Arabia, it is well known that the Arabs there worshipped the moon (Almaqah, Wadd, Amm, Sin); subsequently, unless Allat is the goddess of the moon, there is no evidence that the moon was worshipped by the Arabs of the north. Winnett also draws attention to an inscription written by a priest of Allat. Above the name of Allat has been scratched the name of the Minaean moon-god, Wadd, suggesting by association that Allat, in the north, was synonymous with the Minaean god in the south. This would have been done for the benefit of the Minaean traders (probably at al-Ula) in the hopes of drawing their patronage to this goddess who was the equivalent of Wadd. And finally, Winnett points to the discovery of baetyls of Allat, from al-Hegra and Gebel-Ramm, with horns protruding from the stone block. The resulting crescent shape is indicative of the moon for which the goddess stood.

The goddess al-Uzza was similarly very popular with the Nabataeans as the inscriptions testify. There are dedications to her at Gebel-Ramm, Petra, and Bosra. In fact, Winnett argues that at Petra al-Uzza, and not Allat, was the chief female deity. She resided there, according to him, in the company of a male deity whose title was "Lord of the house" (mar baita).¹¹² Interestingly, Winnett mentions that this title was similar to one applied to Baal Shamin, the Canaanite god, and to Allah (Sura 106.3). The association of al-Uzza or Allat with a male deity "Lord of the house", (Dushara or Allah), could easily produce the

¹¹²Winnett, "Daughters of Allah," 119.

appellation 'Daughter', just as in Canaan, Astarte, who resided with Baal Shamin "Lord of the house", was called his 'sister/wife'. Considering the familiarity between the cultures, as well as the fluidity of relationships between the deities, it is not difficult to imagine that these personal, familial relationships that bound the Canaanite gods together were passed over into Arabian religious life, so that the Arabian pantheon assumed its own family structure. In this way, Allah (or Dushara) personified the father figure and head of the clan, and Allat, al-Uzza, and Manat his daughters/wives. With the emphasis in ancient societies on the procreation and survival of the family, the heavenly model would serve to safeguard that need. This possibility as to the origin of the 'Daughters' will be one of the theories taken up in the Conclusion.

Along with Allat and al-Uzza, Manat was worshipped by the Nabataeans. Teixidor, who describes Manat as "popular" among the Nabataeans, depicts her as a goddess "who appropriates gifts to her worshippers and presides over chance and luck."¹¹³ From his examination of Nabataean inscriptions, Winnett concludes that the worship of Manat was restricted to the Hijaz, that she was in fact too local a goddess to have had any appeal outside of this region.¹¹⁴ In all of the inscriptions, he adds, Manat was associated with Dushara (hence, the term "Daughters"?). Yet Noldeke states that the number of names compounded with Manat

¹¹³Teixidor, Pantheon of Palmyra, 17.

¹¹⁴Winnett, "Daughters of Allah," 119.

"proves" the widespread distribution of her cult in Arabia.¹¹⁵ Such ambiguity is only to be expected given the availability and condition of the data.

From South Arabia, then, to the fringes of Arabian settlements in the north, we find traces of the Daughters of Allah. Their importance to the pagan Arabs seems indisputable, partly, on account of the extent of their worship, and partly from the fact that the migrant Arabs transported their worship from one site to another rather than adopt foreign deities.

¹¹⁵Noldeke, "Arabs (Ancient)".

CHAPTER FIVE

PALMYRA, A CORNERSTONE

Following the decline of Petra in the first century A.D., the city of Palmyra came into prominence such that it was to become one of the richest trading centers of the ancient Near East. It was situated in an oasis in the Syrian desert where the east-to-west caravan trade route, originating in China, crossed the south-to-north route, originating in South Arabia. Its very strategic location plus an abundant supply of water assured Palmyra's prosperity from the Greco-Roman period to the end of the third century A.D. Existing as it did in the very hub of the Hellenistic world, it was exposed to all the colour and diversity of the neighbouring lands; besides having Roman overlords, the Palmyrenes were diffused with Greek, Parthian, and Syro-Phoenician influences.

As always, the information that can be gleaned from Palmyra is based mainly on inscriptions found on altars, stelae and tesserae, and on coins. Epigraphical sources are helpful in providing the names of gods and goddesses, although, sometimes their interpretation can be precarious judging from the number of descriptions like "most likely represented" or "she is probably the goddess", which indicate the largely conjectural nature of

many of the identifications.

According to Teixidor,¹¹⁶ Arab tribes settled in Palmyra in the second century B.C. An inscription dated A.D.115 records that 'Atai the Elder brought Allat, "Lady of the Temple"¹¹⁷, to the Arab quarter sometime in the first century B.C. The temple of Allat was thought to be the cultic centre of the Arabs at Palmyra providing religious and political unity. Its care was in the hands of the Bene Maazin and Bene Nurbel tribes, whose ancestor Yedi Ebel had originally acquired the land.

At Palmyra, Allat was known under the epithets blty, "my Lady" and b'ltk, (of Phoenician origin) "Your Lady".¹¹⁸ On some tesserae these epithets are accompanied by a star, probably Venus, or by a star and crescent. These new symbols in connection with the cult of Allat are indications of the ongoing merger between the Arab gods and the gods from surrounding regions. In Arabia, thus far, there is nothing substantial to link Allat with the morning star; either the goddess al-Uzza in North Arabia or the god 'Athtar in South Arabia was known in this capacity.¹¹⁹ The star and crescent on her tesserae suggest an

¹¹⁶Teixidor, Pantheon of Palmyra,53-54.

¹¹⁷Ibid.,53.

¹¹⁸Ibid.,57.

¹¹⁹Dussaud, Smith, Barton, and Ryckmans identify Allat as "Venus-al Uzza under another name." According to them, both Allat and al-Uzza are epithets of the planet Venus that arose separately in different regions. (Winnett, "The Daughters of Allah",124). Uzza may reasonably be an epithet of Venus, as will be discussed further on, but Allat is less clear.

added dimension to the cult of Allat at Palmyra. Drijvers, writing on the religion of Palmyra, describes it as a predominantly astral one headed by Bel, the "cosmocrator"; Yarhibol, a sun god; Aglibol, a moon god; Baalshamin, a sky god; and Allat/Astarte, female companion of Bel.¹²⁰ Allat, being among the five leading deities, would logically have an astral identity. But not in a solar capacity, as some have her in North Arabia, for in Palmyra she appears on tesserae distinct from the solar gods Shamash, Yarhibol, and Malakbel. Rather, the appearance of the star (the morning star) in connection with Allat suggests her assimilation with the Greek goddess, Aphrodite, and the Babylonian goddess, Ishtar, both well-known in the ancient Near East as goddesses of the morning star.

The crescent on Allat's tesserae could signify her celestial nature, as Hill suggests in his article on Phoenician shrines.¹²¹ It could also signify a lunar association as Winnett proposed earlier. There is some possibility that Astarte was regarded as a moon-goddess by the Phoenicians. Cooke cautiously states: "Ashtarte was not properly a moon-goddess, any more than Ishtar; but in some places she appears in this character."¹²² As well,

¹²⁰H.J.W.Drijvers, The Religion of Palmyra, Iconography of Religions, XV,15 (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1976),9-10.

¹²¹George Francis Hill, "Some Graeco-Phoenician Shrines," Journal of Hellenic Studies vol.xxxi (1911):56-64.

¹²²Cooke, Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions,28.

Lucian remarks, "I think that Astarte is Selene"¹²³, the Greek moon-goddess. If this were the case, Allat may have assumed this characteristic. Drijvers, on the other hand, states that Aglibol was the moon-god at Palmyra, "the only known moon-god from Palmyra."¹²⁴

It would appear, then, that the new iconography associated with the Arabian goddess, Allat, came as the result of the changes she underwent in accordance with the composite nature of Palmyra. As if to underscore the extent of this change, Teixidor observes: "In contrast, the Arabian traits of the Nabataean cults remained practically unaltered for centuries."¹²⁵

At Palmyra, Allat is often accompanied by the Syro-Phoenician god Baal Shamin; in fact, the cults of both deities were in the hands of the Bene Maazin tribe.¹²⁶ The fact that the temple of Baal Shamin was built on land owned by the Bene Maazin suggests again that a close link existed in Palmyra between the Arab gods and the gods of the neighbouring territories. Baal Shamin was known primarily as the god of the sky (of lightening and thunder), and regarded by the agricultural communities of Syria and Phoenicia as the giver of life-supporting rains, i.e.,

¹²³Lucian, De Dea Syria (The Syrian Goddess), Text and Translations 9: Graeco-Roman Religion Series, I, ed. Harold W. Attridge and Robert Oden (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976), 4.

¹²⁴Drijvers, Religion of Palmyra, 10.

¹²⁵Teixidor, Pantheon of Palmyra, 56.

¹²⁶The Bene Maazin was the tribe responsible for bringing the cult of Allat to Palmyra.

the god of fertility. He is sometimes depicted holding a thunderbolt in one hand, symbol of rain; ears of corn in the other, symbol of fertility. It is probable that Allat, who so often appeared in his company on reliefs and inscriptions, particularly those from his temple, was regarded in some measure as a goddess of fertility. Considering the importance of fertility cults in the ancient Near East, it is indeed likely that Allat's exposure to them at Palmyra would result in these changes in, or reinterpretation of, her identity. Drijvers surmises that the pairing of Allat and Baal Shamin at Palmyra is due to the "character of these two deities and their special relationship with the cattlebreeding desert peoples of Arab stock."¹²⁷ It would appear that Baal and Allat formed a partnership responsible for fertility and reproduction, and therefore the prosperity of the tribesmen.

On some of the tesserae found in the temple of the Babylonian god, Bel, Allat was called Astarte, the goddess of the Syro-Phoenicians.¹²⁸ As Astarte, she is often in the company of Bel leading some to assume that she was his female partner.¹²⁹ On the tesserae, she is depicted standing dressed in a long tunic and a polos, carrying a sceptre. Sometimes she stands alone on the obverse of a tesserae, with Bel and his associates, Yarhibol

¹²⁷Drijvers, Religion of Palmyra, 16.

¹²⁸Not only is this evidence of the Babylonian and Syro-Phoenician influence in Palmyra, but, as well, Allat's active participation in these cults.

¹²⁹Teixidor, Pantheon of Palmyra, 8.

and Aglibol, on the reverse; sometimes, she is with a group of deities standing in a line. On one of these, she is specifically named leaving no doubt as to her identity; other times, she is referred to as blty, "My Lady".

Astarte 'may be' the goddess represented on the ceiling of Bel's temple in the company of Yarhibol and Aglibol. This is an interpretation based on the belief that Astarte/Allat was the leading female deity at Palmyra and, therefore, the most likely to be represented.¹³⁰ Although Astarte is the form of Allat most documented at Palmyra, little can be said about her characteristics or deeds because "there is no Phoenician or Palmyrene literature to describe them."¹³¹

Along with Astarte, Allat became identified with Atargatis, the Syrian goddess; with Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess; and with Aphrodite and Athena, Greek goddesses. There is no data as to when Atargatis might have entered the religious scene of Palmyra, but because her temple was one of the four major sanctuaries, it was probably at an early period. In spite of a paucity of physical documentation from Palmyra, there are unmistakable suggestions of her presence there. For example, on certain tesserae depicting Allat, the iconography is such that Teixidor refers to it as "borrowings from the iconography of Atargatis."¹³² These items include a lion and a bird, both well-

¹³⁰Drijvers, Religion of Palmyra, 11.

¹³¹Teixidor, Pantheon of Palmyra, 60.

¹³²Ibid., 57.

known symbols of the Syrian goddess. Then, there is a reference from a text, found in the temple of Baal Shamin, that mentions a temple of Atargatis at Palmyra. Although its location is largely a matter of conjecture, Rostovtzeff,¹³³ in his article "Hadad and Atargatis at Palmyra", suggests a possible site based on the discovery of the end of a fish which was inscribed in the foundations of a temple. The fish, being a sacred symbol of the goddess Atargatis, would likely appear on any temple belonging to her. However, the existence of a temple of Atargatis, independent of the temple of Allat, would seem to indicate that the goddesses were worshipped separately, unlike Astarte/Allat who were assimilated into one goddess. The fact that Allat "often is represented with all the distinctive iconographical traits of Atargatis"¹³⁴, would indeed be the result of "borrowings", then, for in Palmyra, the Arabian goddess no doubt amalgamated the characteristics of the other goddesses in keeping with the demands of this heterogeneous population. One other 'allusion' to Atargatis might be hidden in the sixth century B.C. inscription found in the temenos of the temple of Allat which says, "Allat who is Artemis".¹³⁵ Teixidor surmises that Artemis "probably" refers to the goddess Atargatis, who was called Artemis at Hierapolis by Lucian.

¹³³M. Rostovtzeff, "Hadad and Atargatis at Palmyra," The Journal of the Archaeological Institute of America vol. xxxvii (1933).

¹³⁴Drijvers, The Cults and Beliefs at Edessa, 104.

¹³⁵Teixidor, Pantheon of Palmyra, 62.

Evidence for the presence of Atargatis at Palmyra of a more substantial nature includes one inscription from the year A.D.140 that specifically mentions her: "...to Malakbel, and to the Gad Taimi and to Atargatis, the ancestral deities."¹³⁶ As well, there is a representation of Atargatis on a beam from the temple of Bel.¹³⁷ The representation depicts a fight between a god (Bel?) and a monster around which various deities have gathered as witnesses or participants. Atargatis, dressed like a warrior and armed with a bow, is identified by the fish at her side. Rostovtzeff¹³⁸ lists several examples of tesserae which he presumes represent Atargatis, most likely on account of the accompanying iconography. While not all his presumptions may be accurate, there is one tesserae that very likely depicts this goddess: it is the figure of a seated woman wearing a kalathos and leaning on a sceptre; in front of her, a fish stands on its tail. The presence of the fish is a strong indication that this goddess is indeed Atargatis.

Finally, there is the evidence of coins from Palmyra, although, as Warwick Wroth puts it, they are "badly preserved" and "poorly executed".¹³⁹ There are two coins that Wroth "tentatively" assigns to Atargatis: one having no description

¹³⁶Ibid.,90.

¹³⁷Ibid.,76;an account of this scene is also given by Drijvers, Cults and Beliefs,104.

¹³⁸Rostovtzeff, "Hadad and Atargatis at Palmyra," 59.

¹³⁹Warwick Wroth, Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum,ed. Arnaldo Forni,v.20 (Bologna,Italy, 1964),lvii.

other than "female bust", the other depicting a female seated on a lion. Wroth's hesitation, which is warranted, is apparent in the question-mark that follows Atargatis' name. The lack of any inscription on the coins or iconography other than one lion forces the conclusion that Wroth had other unspecified evidence on which to base his identification.

Drijvers proposes that, judging from her warrior dress, Atargatis might be characterized as a warrior goddess functioning as a tutelary deity, i.e., the Tyche of Palmyra.¹⁴⁰ He refers to the Temple of Nebo wherein there is a stela depicting a seated female whose foot rests on a swimming figure, reminiscent of the Tyche of Antioche.¹⁴¹ Also, from the Temple of the Gadde (or Tychai) at the Palmyrene colony of Dura-Europas, there is a relief which depicts Atargatis as the Tyche of Palmyra. On this relief, Atargatis wears a mural crown and is accompanied by a lion. Drijvers cites other tesserae which, like Rostovtzeff, he feels must represent the goddess Atargatis, although he admits only one expressly names the goddess. He concludes: "The mainly iconographical evidence from Palmyra regarding the Dea Syria stresses her protective character which finds its strongest and fullest expression in her functioning as Tyche of the city."¹⁴²

Mention has already been made of the Babylonian goddess,

¹⁴⁰Drijvers, Cults and Beliefs, 105.

¹⁴¹Teixidor says this goddess is Astarte, indicating the complexity of identifying goddesses by iconography alone. (Pantheon of Palmyra, 60)

¹⁴²Drijvers, Cults and Beliefs, 107.

Ishtar, in connection with the cult of the morning star, Venus. In Babylonia, Ishtar was a battle-loving goddess of war commonly depicted in warrior dress, brandishing a fiery sword. It is apparent that Allat became identified with Ishtar from the tesserae that depict her in warrior garb. For example, on a tessera that names Allat, she is wearing a helmet and carrying a lance in one hand, a shield in the other; on two reliefs from Khirbet Wadi Swane, she again appears in a helmet carrying a sword and spear.¹⁴³ Teixidor maintains that at Palmyra, Ishtar was the goddess, par excellence, and that the derivative 'str following the name Allat/Astarte was an indication that this goddess was the supreme goddess of heaven.¹⁴⁴

Another goddess of outstanding martial character with whom Allat became identified was the Greek goddess Athena. Teixidor differentiates Allat, as Athena, from Allat as a "seated Syrian Atargatis", or Allat as a "standing Astarte".¹⁴⁵ He says that by the second century A.D., Allat had assumed the traits of Athena, standing "with helmet, aegis...spear in the right hand and the left resting on a circular shield."¹⁴⁶ Greek inscriptions found in the Hauran equating Allat with Athena bear this out. Also, a Greek inscription, in the temple of Allat at Palmyra, calls Allat by the name Athena. Drijvers notes the

¹⁴³Drijvers, Religion of Palmyra, 20.

¹⁴⁴Teixidor, Pantheon of Palmyra, 60.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 61.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

equation of the goddesses in his comment, "Allath is the Arab goddess of war, usually represented with helmet and shield like Athena."¹⁴⁷ It is interesting that Allat is referred to as "the Arab goddess of war", for, outside the Palmyrene, her martial aspect is virtually undocumented. In Teixidor's words, "Presumably Athena's cult meant only the acceptance of an iconography that was in vogue and not a true change in the traditional worship of the Arab goddess."¹⁴⁸ Even if an argument could be made that Allat was traditionally known as a goddess of war, it does not seem supportable that that definition anywhere approaches the same title in regard to the goddesses Athena or Ishtar.

As for the goddess Manat in Palmyra, inscriptions dating from the first century B.C. mention her in connection with the supreme god Bel. Her cult was separate from that of Allat's, possibly because their cult centers were in different areas of the city.¹⁴⁹ According to Teixidor, "the two goddesses must have come to the oasis separately, each one as the Fortune of a different Arab group, thus indicating that their personalities may occasionally be concealed under the generic title of the Gad

¹⁴⁷Drijvers, Religion of Palmyra, 20. Whether Allat in warrior dress could be distinguished between 'Allat as Ishtar' or 'Allat as Athena' is doubtful; these two goddesses would be too similar to differentiate unless specifically named.

¹⁴⁸Teixidor, Pantheon of Palmyra, 62.

¹⁴⁹Manat's temple was located atop the Jebel Muntar, the high area of the city; it was established there in the first century A.D.

or Fortune.¹⁵⁰ There is too little evidence on which to draw any conclusions regarding the function of the Arabian goddess Manat at Palmyra. As yet, there has been no reference made to Manat in connection with the Daughters of Allah here.

In regard to the goddess al-Uzza, Teixidor doubts that she was known at Palmyra because her worship was too recent for the Arab Palmyrenes to have known her.¹⁵¹ The Arab tribes in Palmyra, he speculates, separated from other Arab tribes before her worship was prevalent in North Arabia. This remark is based on Ibn al-Kalbi's theory that al-Uzza was the latest, or youngest, of the Daughters of Allah. As was shown in chapter two, this point of al-Uzza's 'youth' is unsettled.

A name that is frequently mentioned at Palmyra is the name of the god Azizos. This name is derived from the cognate root 'Z Z as is al-Uzza, and means 'the strong one'.¹⁵² Teixidor describes Azizos as being "most probably a male personification of Venus..."¹⁵³ yet never suggests that he might be somehow connected with the goddess al-Uzza, despite the similarity of names and cults.

Drijvers discusses at some length the god Azizos and his companions Arsu and Monimos, Arsu being the name of the god who accompanied Azizos in the Palmyrene region, Monimos in the

¹⁵⁰Teixidor, Pantheon of Palmyra, 17.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 17.

¹⁵²Ibid., 68-69.

¹⁵³Ibid., 69.

northern regions of the Syrian desert.¹⁵⁴ Dussaud has suggested that Azizos and Monimos are hypostases of the South Arabian god 'Athtar, i.e., they are twin gods who represent the two aspects of the planet Venus, the morning and evening star.¹⁵⁵ There is evidence that in South Arabia 'Athtar was sometimes referred to as 'Attar azizan, "the strong 'Attar"¹⁵⁶ substantiating this argument. Perhaps the epithet 'azizan' came to be used in place of the proper name of the god 'Athtar as seems to occur in ancient religions. Al-Uzza, the goddess, or Azizos, the god, could have originated as references to the planet Venus which was originally called 'Athtar.

Drijvers, while admitting to the likelihood of some relation between al-Uzza and Azizos, says at first cautiously, "It is sufficient to state that the cult of al-Uzza and of Azizos and Monimos is attested at some time in the same area, i.e., the northern part of the Syrian and Mesopotamian desert."¹⁵⁷ However, later on in his discussion, he becomes more aggressive: "He [Azizos] is the masculine form of the deity whose feminine aspect was al-Uzza, who represents the martial aspect of the Arabic Venus star."¹⁵⁸ So, there is consensus that Azizos and

¹⁵⁴Drijvers, Cults and Beliefs, 150-151.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 150.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 151-152; words from the root 'Z Z, like azizan, are used in this manner in the Qur'an to refer to Allah, "the All-Strong".

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 152.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 161.

al-Uzza were two aspects of the same deity, and that both were known to have been worshipped in the northern regions of Syria. Drijvers' classification of al-Uzza as the "martial aspect" of Venus is based on his theory that there is a relationship between the cult of the sun and the cult of Venus (morning star), wherein the latter served as protector and escort of the sun.¹⁵⁹ Accordingly, the goddess al-Uzza was seen as a warrior goddess whose function was to lead and protect caravans and travellers across the desert, just as she guided the sun across the sky. This protective function is evident in the number of times al-Uzza is invoked in taking oaths.

LaGrange, in his article "Palmyrenes", mentions the fact that the god Azizu was worshipped at Palmyra as the planet Venus; in this context, he remarks "Azizu is elsewhere the morning star, who afterwards became al-Uzza, the female divinity known in the Qur'an."¹⁶⁰ LaGrange's assumption that Azizos preceded the goddess al-Uzza seems questionable if they were in fact two aspects of the same deity, the planet Venus. Their differences, aside from gender, were probably geographical rather than chronological. Notwithstanding this, however, the placement of Azizos (and therefore, most likely, al-Uzza) at Palmyra undermines Teixidor's conclusion that al-Uzza was unknown at

¹⁵⁹It may be recalled from chapter three that the South Arabian god Athtar, as the morning star Venus, was seen as a warrior god; as well, he was closely associated with the cult of the sun.

¹⁶⁰Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 1917ed., s.v. "Palmyrenes," by M.J.LaGrange.

Palmyra. Even though her name was not recorded, her cult seems to have been known in this region. As well, if a primitive relationship between Azizos in the north and 'Athtar in the south existed, the cult of Azizos/Uzza more than likely was known to the Arab tribes of the north far earlier than Ibn al-Kalbi suggested, thus corroborating Winnett's argument concerning the goddess al-Uzza.

Perhaps, then, it would be more accurate to say that the cult of the Venus star was present at Palmyra in the form of the male god Azizos who was the complement of the female goddess al-Uzza. Her role at Palmyra is as yet undiscovered. As well, it has yet to be discovered whether the goddesses al-Uzza, Manat, and Allat were known at Palmyra as the Daughters of Allah.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PHOENICIAN/SYRIAN COUNTERPARTS

Perhaps the singlemost important chapter in terms of our problem, the preceding discussion of Palmyra has advanced our potential for discovering the identity of the Daughters of Allah, as opposed to merely the existence of the Daughters, through the identification of their counterparts in the ancient Near East. In light of the communication that Arabia maintained with ancient Canaan and Syria, Allat's association with Astarte and Atargatis at Palmyra suggests that the Arabian goddess shared characteristics, possibly unknown to us from Arabian sources, with those foreign goddesses. This chapter will examine first Astarte, then, Atargatis to discover their most prominent traits, the assumption being that these traits comprised the common bond between the Arabian goddess(es) and her Near Eastern counterparts. What can be said about Astarte and Atargatis, then, could, to a certain extent, be applied to the Arabian goddesses, at least to the extent to which they were assimilated at Palmyra.

Astarte was the principle goddess of the Phoenicians,

"Greatest Astarte"¹⁶¹ as Philo referred to her. Aside from the Phoenicians, she was widely venerated throughout the Mediterranean basin primarily as a goddess of sexuality and fertility, and to a certain degree as a goddess of war. There is some evidence that she was identified with the planet Venus, although this is not conclusive as will be shown further on. The main sources of information concerning the goddess Astarte are Philo of Byblos, the Bible, numismatics, inscriptional evidence, and secondary literary sources.

When speaking of Astarte, it is a common occurrence among scholars to interchange her name with that of the goddess Ishtar. The presumption is, of course, that Astarte is the northern counterpart of the Babylonian Ishtar and that many of the traits and characteristics of that goddess can be used to describe Astarte.¹⁶² Because there is comparatively little known about Astarte, Ishtar provides a viable means of studying her. Where there is insufficient data in relation to Astarte, then, reference will be made to Ishtar.

That Astarte was, above all else, a goddess of sexual

¹⁶¹Harold W. Attridge and Robert A.Oden,Jr., Philo of Byblos:The Phoenician History, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly:Monograph Series;9 (Washington,D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981),31._

¹⁶²"There can be no doubt that the prototype of the Phoenician Astarte was the Assyrian Ishtar; to a considerable degree the character of the goddesses was alike, and both filled the most prominent place in the worship of the two races." Cooke, Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions,27; "the prototype of Astarte was Ishtar..." A Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings,1906ed., s.v. "Ashtoreth," by S.R.Driver.

passion and fertility remains unchallenged. Philo tells us that her two children were named "Desire" and "Love",¹⁶³ appropriate callings for the offspring of a goddess of love. One of her epithets was Kadesh, "temple harlot"¹⁶⁴, and the practice of sacred prostitution in her service is well documented. The Bible¹⁶⁵ refers to temple harlots and the immoral acts they committed in the service of Astarte.¹⁶⁶ The prohibition of such behaviour is made abundantly clear by the author of Deuteronomy: "There shall be no cult prostitute of the Daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a cult prostitute of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wage of a dog, into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow; for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God."¹⁶⁷ The pervasiveness of this theme in the Bible is a good indication of the tenacity with which the people clung to old traditions, as well as an indication of the overriding popularity of the goddess

¹⁶³Attridge and Oden, Philo of Byblos, 24.

¹⁶⁴Kadesh (Qadhesh, Qudshu) refers to sacred prostitution which was an important part of Canaanite worship; Qadhesh is derived from a word meaning "to be holy", which speaks of the sanctity with which this practice was regarded. Deut. 23.17, Harper Study Bible, R.S.V. 1981ed.

¹⁶⁵1 Kings 14.24 R.S.V.; Hosea 4.13-14 R.S.V.

¹⁶⁶Paton argues that while temple harlots are mentioned, they are never associated specifically with the cult of Astarte; however, if they belonged to her in the colonies, they doubtless belonged to her in the homeland, Phoenicia. "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

¹⁶⁷Deut. 23.17-18, R.S.V.

Astarte, "the abomination of the Sidonians"¹⁶⁸.

Lucian¹⁶⁹ gives an eye-witness account of the practice of cult prostitution at the temple of Aphrodite (Astarte) in Byblos. He says that yearly the people mourned the death of the god Adonis, and to commemorate his suffering the women ritually sacrificed their virtue or their hair; the offering of the hair was conceived to be a rite of fertility, probably, because it was an essential part of a woman's sexuality.

Herodotus¹⁷⁰ describes a similar custom in Babylonia. According to him, every native woman, once in her life, had to sit in the temple of the goddess of fertility¹⁷¹ until some stranger 'bought' her. This obligatory act of prostitution was no less than a duty to be fulfilled in honour of the goddess. Sacred prostitution at the temple of Astarte is also said to have occurred at Hierapolis (modern Baalbek) and Aphaka, both in Lebanon¹⁷². There, as well, women were obligated by duty to offer themselves to strangers. Emperor Constantine found the rites so licentious and offensive, he abolished them and

¹⁶⁸11Kings 23.13, R.S.V. According to Herbert G. May, the term Sidonians refers not merely to the people of Sidon, but to the Phoenicians. Oxford Bible Atlas, 2nd ed. (London and New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974), 140.

¹⁶⁹Lucian, De Dea Syria, 6.

¹⁷⁰Herodotus, The Histories, 1.199.

¹⁷¹Herodotus calls her Aphrodite, the natives Mylitta, which is no doubt a name of Ishtar.

¹⁷²Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 1914 ed., s.v. "Hierodouloi," by George A. Barton.

destroyed the temples. This practice was likely carried on in Egypt, too, if the "Qudshu-Astarte-Anath" relief¹⁷³ is any indication. On it is depicted a nude goddess holding a lotus flower and a serpent in her hands, and under which is inscribed "Qudshu-Astarte-Anath".

The appearance of cult prostitution over such a widespread area caused Barton to comment, "As hierodouloi in some form are traceable in so many parts of the heathen Semitic world, it is probable that it was a primitive Semitic institution, which survived in practically all the Semitic nations."¹⁷⁴ If Astarte was a primitive Semitic deity, it is also probable that she was originally, in some form (Ishtar, Atargatis, 'Athtar etc.), worshipped in the capacity of fertility goddess. In ancient Canaan, as was mentioned in chapter three, she is known from the Ugaritic texts as the consort of Baal, the fertility god. If her earliest known role was as the consort of the god of fertility, it is likely that she had her roots in the ancient Semitic fertility cults.

That Astarte was identified with Aphrodite¹⁷⁵, the Greek goddess of love, by the Phoenicians and Greeks alike, is further evidence of her sexual nature. The resemblance of Aphrodite to

¹⁷³E.S. Edwards, "A relief of Qudshu-Astarte-Anath in the Winchester College Collection," Journal of Near Eastern Studies v.14-15, (1955-6).

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 675.

¹⁷⁵"the Phoenicians say that Astarte is Aphrodite"; Philo of Byblos, 32.

Astarte is no coincidence, according to Drivers: "...nothing is more certain than that her [Aphrodite's] attributes were largely moulded upon those of Ashtart, and that many elements in her cult were of Phoenician origin."¹⁷⁶ These sentiments are echoed by Smith.¹⁷⁷ Accordingly, the erotic sexuality of Aphrodite was in large measure a reflection of her prototype Astarte.

Other evidence of her sexuality comes from terra-cotta figurines from Palestine that depict her usually as a naked goddess standing full face on a lion;¹⁷⁸ she holds a serpent in her hand, an ancient symbol of fertility.¹⁷⁹ Another type from Taanach shows her in a tall headdress wearing a necklace, anklets, and girdle with her hands at her breasts, emphasizing her sexuality. Hundreds of plaques from Gezer were found depicting a nude goddess "who is doubtless Astarte".¹⁸⁰ Not only is her sexuality confirmed but, as well, her preeminence is established by the fact that no other images were found at these levels. Figurines found in the colonies likewise depict her

¹⁷⁶Drivers, "Ashtoreth".

¹⁷⁷Smith, Religion of the Semites, "The Cyprian Aphrodite is the Semitic Astarte and her ritual is throughout marked with a Semitic stamp." 470; see as well, Michael C. Astour, Hellenosemitica: An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece, with a forward by Cyprus H. Gordon (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965).

¹⁷⁸Paton, "Canaanites".

¹⁷⁹The snake yearly sloughs off its skin replacing the old one with a new one, and it therefore became a symbol of the renewal of life, rebirth in nature.

¹⁸⁰Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

naked, sometimes with her hands holding her breasts, sometimes holding a dove to her breast, the dove being sacred to her. One further indication of her role as fertility goddess is to be found in the use of her name, asterot (plural form of Astarte), as a common noun to signify "increase of the flock".¹⁸¹ The multiplication of the herds was naturally attributed to the goddess of fertility.

In connection with her role as fertility goddess was Astarte's identification as mother-goddess. As goddess of fertility, Astarte was the enticer, or promoter, of fertility in all forms of life; as goddess of maternity, she nurtured the new life she had inspired. This notion of the mother-goddess, protectress and provider, was very likely one of her original functions as the head of the tribe in early matriarchal societies. In such societies the female deity personified the guardian mother-figure, the parent. From Sidon there is an inscription which Oden translates as "Astarte is (Divine-) Mother."¹⁸² While acknowledging Cooke's translation of this inscription as "hand-maid of Astarte", Oden claims his own is correctly supported by Donner and Rolig. Teixidor, like Oden, describes Astarte as "the natural mother of all things."¹⁸³

¹⁸¹Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971 ed., s.v. "Ashtoreth," by Tikva S. Frymer.

¹⁸²Robert A. Oden, Jr, Studies in Lucian's De Syria Dea, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 15, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), 77.

¹⁸³Teixidor, The Pagan God, 36.

There is additional evidence from the colonies that Astarte was conceived as Mother-goddess: in Carthage a proper name translates "Ashtart is a mother", and at Paphos the goddess is called "mother".¹⁸⁴ As well, there are representations of Astarte as a mother-figure about which Fahd comments "The so-called 'Astarte Plaques', clay figurines of a mother-goddess generally associated with the fertility cults, may be another representation of the goddess."¹⁸⁵ Finally, there is Philo's testimony that Astarte herself was the mother of two sons.

If these sources are inadequate in showing that Astarte functioned as a mother-goddess, there is ample evidence to be found in Babylonian mythology in regard to her 'prototype' Ishtar. In representations Ishtar is depicted holding a nursing child in her arm. Her titles include "mother of the gods" and "creatress of mankind", and one of her names, Mylitta, (Mu'allidtu), means 'she who causes to bear'.¹⁸⁶ In the myths (for example, the Deluge), she personifies the compassionate mother who mourns the death of her children, or who comforts them through their misfortunes.

While Astarte was especially revered as a goddess of love and fertility, she was also known, to some extent, as a goddess of war. This characteristic might again be a relic of the early days when Semitic women took responsibility for the preservation

¹⁸⁴Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

¹⁸⁵Frymer, "Ashtoreth".

¹⁸⁶Paton, "Ishtar".

of the tribe. The earliest known literary evidence of Astarte, the Ugaritic texts of Ras Shamra, portrays her in such a minor role that her identity is obscure.¹⁸⁷ Nowhere really in these texts is she portrayed as a warrior goddess unless she is to be read into the character of her 'sister' Anat. The closest she comes to a fight seems to be when she is named in an oath along with the god Horon: "May Horon break. O my son, may Horon break thy head, Astarte name of Baal thy pate."¹⁸⁸

Her identification as a warrior goddess seems unlikely to have originated in her homeland, Canaan/Phoenicia; it was more likely a foreign development at a later time. There is evidence from the colonies around the Mediterranean basin (at Cythera, Corinth, and Sparta) that warrior goddesses, called Astarte and Aphrodite, were depicted with helmet and shield.¹⁸⁹ These representations are undoubtedly from a much later period.

In Egypt, Astarte was also well known as a warrior goddess where she was commonly depicted on horseback armed with a shield.¹⁹⁰ But whether this identification arose independently in Egypt, or was the result of her close association with Anat, who was the Canaanite warrior, par excellence, is unknown. Her

¹⁸⁷Astarte's role is so insignificant that scholar's refer to her as 'the alter ego' of Anat; Frymer, "Ashtoreth".

¹⁸⁸Dahood, "Ancient Semitic Deities in Syria and Palestine", 83.

¹⁸⁹Driver, "Ashtoreth"; Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

¹⁹⁰Oden, Jr., Studies in Lucian's De Dea Syria, 75-76.

original 'non-warrior' status seems to be implied in the statement, "The Canaanite Astarte was regarded by the Egyptians as a war goddess."¹⁹¹ However, it is a usual occurrence to read descriptions of Astarte such as "This warlike character of Astarte..." or "These two goddesses [Astarte and Anat] are also closely connected in Canaanite myth, in which both are characterized as goddesses of war."¹⁹²

The supposition that Astarte was a war-goddess is greatly enhanced if one prescribes to the belief that the Babylonian Ishtar accurately characterizes the Phoenician Astarte in this aspect. The number of times that Ishtar was applauded for her blood-thirsty behaviour in battle is sufficient proof that she was venerated as a warrior goddess.¹⁹³ However, the lack of comparable sources from the north in regard to the goddess Astarte suggests that, at least in Syria and Phoenicia, she was not the vanguard of the armies, but inherited this trait only when she was assimilated with other goddesses in foreign locales.

There are differences of opinion whether Astarte personified the planet Venus. The evidence in support of this theory often hinges on her identification with Ishtar whose association with this planet is undisputed. A typical description of Astarte is:

¹⁹¹Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

¹⁹²Edwards, "Qudshu-Astarte-Anat," 51.

¹⁹³Arvid S.Kapelrud goes into considerable detail in describing Ishtar's warrior prowess in The Violent Goddess: Anat in the Ras Shamra Texts, (Oslo, Norway: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), 18-19.

"Like her Akkadian counterpart Istar, she is an astral deity and is associated with the evening star."¹⁹⁴

It could be reasonably argued that Astarte must represent Venus, being the female counterpart of the Venus god Athtar. Albright makes just this point in his statement, "Astarte was goddess of the evening star, and originally she must have been identical with a male figure, Athtar, god of the morning star, known to us from South Arabia."¹⁹⁵ If Athtar was the primitive Semitic Venus deity, then there is merit to the supposition that Astarte, like Ishtar, was a primitive Venus deity. The dilemma is, as in many aspects of this study, that the scarcity of source material that specifically pertains to Astarte, hinders accurate descriptions of her. So often, the characteristics assigned to her are the results of comparative analysis with other deities.

On tesserae from Phoenicia, there is often a star and a crescent that accompany her. Because the star in particular is such a consistent part of Semitic religion and is such a recurring part of Astarte's iconography, there is good reason to suppose that her worship included the Venus star. Hill, however, interprets the star in a more generalized manner: "The star marks the deity as celestial."¹⁹⁶

That many scholars believe her to have been regarded as a

¹⁹⁴Frymer, "Ashtoreth".

¹⁹⁵William Foxwell Albright, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel, the Ayer Lecture of the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, 1941, 4th ed. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1956), 74.

¹⁹⁶Hill, "Some Graeco-Phoenician Shrines," 60.

Venus deity is evident from such statements: "It is true that Astarte was worshipped, inter alia, as the planet Venus...", "Her cult is better identified with that of the star Venus."¹⁹⁷ Evidence to the contrary is less documented but significant nevertheless. Paton, for one, argues: "In Babylonia she [Astarte-Ishtar] is identified with the planet Venus (also with Sirius and Virgo), but this goddess does not appear elsewhere, except in late writers who have been influenced by Babylonian theology."¹⁹⁸ He then lists a number of authors including Philo, who have, in his opinion, attributed the identification with Venus to Astarte-Ishtar in places other than Babylonia. Therefore, according to this line of thinking, in the northern regions of Syro/Phoenicia, Astarte was unknown in this capacity until the time of such writings.

Along with Paton's views, there is an argument from silence, i.e., there is no mention in the Ras Shamra texts of Astarte in association with the worship of the planet Venus. In view of the fact that so many of the dominant characteristics of the Canaanite goddesses are revealed (as pertain to fertility, war, maternity etc.), these texts, unlike the Babylonian texts, are remarkably silent about the existence, or identity of, a Venus star deity. This absence could suggest that, in ancient Canaan, Astarte was not revered in this aspect, but, as her cult grew in importance, she took on the characteristics of other leading

¹⁹⁷Astour, Hellenosemitica, 124; Teixidor, The Pagan God, 37.

¹⁹⁸Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

goddesses in the Near East.

Another type of argument from silence can be found in descriptions about the goddess Astarte which are comprehensive and well documented, yet which omit any discussion of her in association with the planet Venus. A good example is Cooke¹⁹⁹ whose summary of the goddess is often referred to. Aside from her more dominant characteristics, he includes a reference to the possibility that she was a moon-goddess, which is based on relatively slight evidence, yet does not identify her specifically with Venus. Likewise, Albright²⁰⁰, who is writing on the subject of the Canaanite pantheon, vividly describes the well-known characteristics of Astarte and says nothing about Venus.

While the question of her identification with Venus is undecided, there seems to be a consensus that she was, at the least, an astral deity. The Bible frequently identifies her as the 'Queen of Heaven'²⁰¹, a title supported by Philo²⁰² who informs us that Ouranos (Heaven) was her father and/or husband.

¹⁹⁹Cooke, Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions, 27. Cooke does mention Venus as a title of Aphrodite, and identifies Astarte with Aphrodite, but does not directly attribute this feature to Astarte.

²⁰⁰William Foxwell Albright, From the Stone Age To Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process, 2nd. ed. with a new introduction (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1967), 233-234.

²⁰¹Jer. 7.18; Jer. 44.17 R.S.V. This term is sometimes attributed to Ishtar.

²⁰²Attridge and Oden, Philo of Byblos, 22.

We have already mentioned Hill who identifies Astarte as a celestial goddess as evidenced by the star and crescent that appear with her on the coins of Phoenicia. On this rather ambiguous note, we leave the discussion of the predominant characteristics of the goddess Astarte.

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the worship of this Phoenician goddess was widespread. Her principle city was Sidon where, in fact, Solomon is reputed to have built a temple for her. The importance of her cult there is evident from the Sidonian coins on which she figured so prominently. Byblos (ancient Gebal) was another especially sacred centre where Astarte was known simply as Ba'alath, 'mistress'.²⁰³ Her presence on the coins is again a testimony of her popularity.

Astarte was also the mistress of Tyre, Aradus, Ascalon and of the colony cities such as Cyprus, Eryx (Sicily) and Carthage. Philo mentions an interesting incident in relation to Tyre. He says that Astarte found a star which fell from the sky, "She took it up and consecrated it to Tyre, the holy island."²⁰⁴ The suggestion has been made that the star that fell was Attar (Athtar), the South Arabian god, who was forced to leave the 'heavenly realm' in recognition of his failure to replace Baal.²⁰⁵ Athtar's fall from grace, which was noted in chapter three, and his subsequent consecration by his female counterpart,

²⁰³Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

²⁰⁴Attridge and Oden, Philo of Byblos, 31, 32.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 88, f.n. 96.

seemingly restores the bond between Canaan and South Arabia.

The symbols most often attached to the cult of Astarte were the lion, her most sacred animal; the crescent and star, which mark her celestial character; and possibly horns. Of the latter, Philo wrote: "Astarte placed upon her own head a bull's head as an emblem of kingship."²⁰⁶ The bull is the sacred animal of Baal in Phoenicia. Because Astarte figured more prominently in the ancient fertility cults than Baal, her wearing the bull's horns would symbolize, as Philo intimated, her supremacy over all other deities. A horned Astarte might also symbolize her fertility aspect as "the increase of the flocks", in this case the horns representing the sheep and cows of the herds.

The horns adorning Astarte's head may have possibly been interpreted as the crescent moon, thus leading some to identify her with the moon. Lucian, in speaking of Astarte's temple in Sidon, says, "I think that Astarte is Selene."²⁰⁷ Cooke drew attention to the possibility of her being associated with the moon when he remarked, "...in some places she [Astarte] appears in this character."²⁰⁸ However, he also points out that Astarte took on the iconography of the Egyptian goddesses Isis and Hathor, i.e., the solar disc between two cow horns. These symbols, possibly, were mistaken for the full and crescent moon. There is also the possibility that Astarte was identified as a

²⁰⁶ Philo of Byblos, 31.

²⁰⁷ Lucian, De Dea Syria, 4.

²⁰⁸ Cooke, Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions, 27.

moon-goddess as the result of her association in Palmyra with Allat, if, Allat was the Arabian moon-goddess (Winnett). Teixidor, however, aware of such possibilities, states firmly: "She [Astarte] was never a Moon-goddess, even though late syncretistic ideas presented her as such."²⁰⁹

Besides these more prominent symbols, Allat was also identified by the dove, "probably on account of its erotic temperament"²¹⁰; sometimes, by oxen, cones, and the cypress tree. In regard to iconographies, however, it was clear from Palmyra how 'contaminated' they became from exposure to foreign cults, so that the original identity of a particular goddess was easily confused. For example, Allat, who was depicted on tesserae from Palmyra with a lion and a bird, unless specifically named, could not be differentiated from the goddesses Astarte or Atargatis, who have these same identifying symbols. While this problem of iconographies does hinder accurate identification of a goddess, it, at the same time, serves to show the basic homogeneity of Near Eastern cults; that is, the close similarities of the deities is a reflection of the close similarity of human needs that these deities fulfilled.

Atargatis, the second major goddess familiar to us from Palmyra, functioned in Syria much as Astarte did in Phoenicia. She is known mainly from a treatise by Lucian of Samosata (circa A.D.200), entitled De Dea Syria, which is an eye-witness account

²⁰⁹Teixidor, The Pagan God, 36.

²¹⁰Paton, "Ishtar"

of the cult of the goddess at Hierapolis. Although, in his treatise, Lucian never refers to this goddess as Atargatis, but as Hera,²¹¹ there are sufficient reasons for believing in her Syrian identity: the title of Lucian's work, De Dea Syria is the title by which Atargatis was commonly known; also, Lucian informs us that the people at Hierapolis said the temple of the goddess was built by Semiramis for her mother Derceto (the Greek form of Atargatis); at Delos, where she was worshipped, her priests called themselves Hierapolitans, after the name of her cult centre. Aside from this treatise, there is the evidence of coins and inscriptions, as well as a few scattered writings of classical scholars which mention Atargatis. However, left to these latter, our knowledge of the Syrian goddess would be comparatively nonexistent.

Atargatis' primary function was fertility as symbolized by fish²¹² and water. Both elements represent her life-giving qualities and are to be found in the vicinity of the temples where she was venerated: "No sanctuary of hers was complete without having attached to it a sacred pond, in which untouchable

²¹¹"In identifying the Syrian goddess with a Greek deity, Lucian is only following the convention of other Greek visitors to the Near East...Hera is plainly not the native name of the goddess of Hierapolis." Oden, Jr., Studies in Lucians De Dea Syria, 48.

²¹²In the cities where she was worshipped, she was represented usually (although not at Hierapolis) as half-woman, half-fish.

fish swam about."²¹³

So much of Lucian's account of the cult at Hierapolis has to do with water (even the ancient name of the city itself, Mabbug, has the meaning 'spring'), that one cannot but assume that the roots of the goddess, Atargatis, originated in the mysterious powers of water. Lucian relates that when a chasm was formed in the earth and swallowed up the water following the great flood, a temple was built over it and dedicated to Atargatis.²¹⁴ Her temple, it would seem, was erected at that time both to honour the goddess, as well as to ensure her permanent presence at Hierapolis. Apparently, the receding of the waters of the great disaster was attributed to the actions of the goddess, i.e., divine intervention, and therefore a ritual was established "as a memorial both of the disaster and of the divine favor."

Another water-related ritual was known as the Descent to the Lake in which the sacred objects from the temple went in procession to the lake.²¹⁵ Atargatis headed the procession "for the sake of the fish" who would die should Hadad see them first. Lucian does not explain the significance of this custom but it likely was a fertility rite of some kind, if only because the

²¹³Nelson Glueck, Deities and Dolphins: The Story of the Nabataeans (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), 391. On this subject Smith discusses the very early fascination ancient Near Easterners had for sacred waters, and in regard to fish says, "the divine life of the waters resides in the sacred fish that inhabit them." Religion of the Semites, 174.

²¹⁴Lucian, De Dea Syria, 13.

²¹⁵Ibid., 47.

fish are figured so prominently. It is possible this visitation was a ritual in memory of the goddess' earlier metamorphosis into a fish after which all fish were sacred to her.

Atargatis' special affinity to water is but one of many instances in the ancient Near East where deities were identified with the life-giving powers of water. It was thought that sacred waters were instinct with the energy of the deity, that the waters were actually charged with a divine power²¹⁶. This being the case, the possession of sacred water would render its owner some of the vitalizing instincts of the gods. This might have been the purpose behind the pilgrimage to the sea to which Lucian refers.²¹⁷ What he says is that the pilgrims returned from the sea with a sealed vessel of water. These vessels were ritually opened and the water carried inside Atargatis' temple. Once inside, the sacred water was used for libations, and a sacrifice was performed to the goddess. This was doubtless another rite of fertility whereby the vitalizing power of the deity, inherent in the water, was poured over the devotee in the hopes of capturing its life-giving qualities.

The identification of the deity with the fertilizing powers of water was touched upon in chapter three in reference to the South Arabian god, Athtar. If it can be accepted that one of the

²¹⁶Smith gives examples of sacred springs or wells from South Arabia to Syria in order to demonstrate that the worship of water, and the deities therein, was a common Semitic practice.Religion of the Semites, 167-169.

²¹⁷Lucian, De Dea Syria, 48

components of Atargatis (Atar Ate) is the goddess Astarte²¹⁸, then the relationship between Atargatis, Athtar/Astarte and water becomes evident. Just like Athtar, Atargatis is thought to have originally been a deity of underground springs whose creative force inspired all seedlings to fruition. Plutarch described her as "the divinity who out of moisture produces the seeds of all things."²¹⁹ Paton considers her as the local manifestation of the primitive Semitic deity Istar-Athtar.²²⁰ White, reviewing the dominant characteristics of her cult, especially those relating to fish and sacred ponds, concludes "she is probably a personification of the fertilizing power of water."²²¹

It has been the intention in the preceding discussion to draw attention to the primitive Semitic worship of a deity whose name (some version of Athtar) referred to the natural means by which water sustained life. Paton offers such terms as "to be watered", "the self-watering, i.e., the spring" to translate this name.²²² Throughout the ancient Near East, as has been evident, this deity surfaces repeatedly in different manifestations but with sufficient original characteristics to demonstrate again the underlying homogeneity of that area.

²¹⁸Oden, Jr. Studies in Lucian's De Syria Dea, 60-64.

²¹⁹Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte", citing Plutarch.

²²⁰Paton, "Atargatis."

²²¹A Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings, 1906ed. s.v. "Atargatis," by H.A.White.

²²²Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

One other aspect of her cult, "connected with Syrian and Mesopotamian goddesses of fertility",²²³ was the practice of castration. Devotees, apparently seeking the ultimate union with the goddess, emasculated themselves in her honour. That this act was regarded as a rite of fertility is unquestioned in spite of its seeming self-contradiction. By way of explanation, Albright offers the suggestion that castration can be likened with fecundity in the same way that virginity was with fertility in ancient Near Eastern cults.²²⁴ In any case, licentious acts were carried out between the Galli, emasculated priests, and the women devotees under the auspices of encouraging the beneficence of the goddess, Atargatis. Lucian relates that "women desire the Galli and the Galli go mad for a woman. Yet, no one is jealous..."²²⁵ These rites, described by Lucian as being 'quite holy', were likely of a nature similar to those of Astarte (cult prostitution), which were condemned by the Emperor Constantine.

Evidence of a different sort includes terracotta figurines, found in Hierapolis and northern Syria, which depict Atargatis nude and pressing her breasts;²²⁶ as well, there exists a bronze offertory-box, used by the priests of Atargatis, in the form of a breast with a slit that allowed for donations. On the coins from

²²³Drijvers, Cults and Beliefs at Edessa, 78.

²²⁴Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity, 234.

²²⁵Lucian, De Dea Syria, 22

²²⁶Drijvers, Cults and Beliefs at Edessa, 91.

Hierapolis,²²⁷ Atargatis is represented holding ears of corn in her hand, symbol of fertility. Finally, her consort Baal Hadad, the Syrian god of fertility, was frequently depicted with her on coins or on reliefs. For all his importance, however, her role as goddess of fertility greatly exceeded his as is indicated by the prevalence of figurines representing Atargatis, where none exist with Hadad. As early as the fourth century B.C., Atargatis had overtaken Hadad as the dominant partner.

Although Atargatis was worshipped primarily as a goddess of fertility, she also represented a type of warrior goddess. However, unlike the battle-loving warrior goddesses Ishtar and Athena, Atargatis was characterized as less of a "warrior" in that sense and more of a protectress; in this respect she guarded the city and its inhabitants from external danger. The mural crown which she wore is symblematic of her protective function.²²⁸ Coins of Atargatis commonly depict her wearing the turreted crown and holding a sheaf of grain or an ear of corn, exemplifying her dual capacity as protectress and provider; as well, she is frequently represented with a sceptre in her hand indicative of her ability to defend. Lucian's description of the goddess at Hierapolis mentions the sceptre in her hand, and may possibly be the reason for his comparison of her with Athena: "On the whole she is certainly Hera [Atargatis], but she also has

²²⁷Ibid.,90.

²²⁸Tyche was the name of the goddess who wore the turreted crown as the defender of the city; Atargatis has assumed this function at Hierapolis.

something of Athena..."²²⁹

There is little or no information in regard to other characteristics attributed to the goddess Atargatis. Some mention was made that she was a mother-goddess, with a close resemblance to Asherah of the Ras Shamra texts, but unfortunately not enough is known to say much more at this point.

The Syrian goddess was worshipped over a fairly extensive area, judging from the distribution of her cult centers, which included Ascalon (the centre of her cult in Palestine), Karnaim, Edessa, Dura-Europas, and Delos. Lucian tells us that people came from "the whole of Syria and Arabia...and from beyond the Euphrates..."²³⁰ to worship the goddess at Hierapolis. He also records that the temple of the goddess was the holiest and wealthiest of all the temples he knew about, "for many treasures come to them from Arabia, Phoenicia and Babylonia and still more from Cappadocia."²³¹

Her typical iconography consisted mainly of fish, doves and lions. There is a bas-relief from Northern Mesopotamia depicting Atargatis sitting on a throne decorated with fish, on each side of which are two lions, and on top are doves;²³² the presence of the fish is the determining factor for this identification. Otherwise, the goddess might as easily be Astarte. On coins

²²⁹Lucian, De Dea Syria, 32.

²³⁰Ibid., 13.

²³¹Ibid., 10

²³²Drijvers, Cults and Beliefs from Edessa, 92.

Atargatis is represented with one or two of these symbols as identification marks, unless she is specifically named.

Having examined these two goddesses, Astarte and Atargatis, with regard to their primary functions in ancient Near Eastern religion, we can return to our main topic of discussion, and apply this newly acquired information to the solution of the problem.

CONCLUSIONS

This last section will consider the data, accumulated in the previous sections, in an attempt to satisfy our initial inquiry, namely, who were the Daughters of Allah? In pursuing this problem, we explored many avenues in order that our results might include all relevant sources of information. Beginning with an investigation of a passage from the Qur'an, that referred to these goddesses, we endeavoured to determine their origins from the cognate root of their names. In spite of the ambiguity that any such investigation carries with it, much useful information was obtained. The summation of these goddesses, as given by Ibn al-Kalbi, as well as the contributions from the commentators on the Qur'an, provided further insight taking into account the limited presentation of the former and the inevitable bias of the latter. Leaving aside our literary sources, we then turned to the more constructive evidence found in the epigraphical remains of trading centers situated on the ancient caravan highways. Accepting the premise that early traces of the religion of the pagan Arabs would be found in established urban centers, and not in the rural wastelands, our attention was focused primarily on those. In addition, because the religions of the adjacent regions were viewed as having a significant impact on the religion of Arabia, those centers along the caravan route most

susceptible to foreign influence were selected.

From this geographical survey, it became apparent that Canaanite religion was singularly manifest throughout the Arabian peninsula; from the south, where the god 'Athtar was preeminent, to the north, at Teima, Elath and Petra, the deities from the Canaanite pantheon were conspicuous. Other foreign influences were noted such as the unmistakable signs of Babylonian presence in Arabia, for example, at Teima²³³ where the Babylonian king, Nabonidus, settled. Then, in the north, the Arabian outposts established there were seen to have been heavily pervaded with the Hellenism of the Greco-Roman world. The Nabataean kingdom, which at one time reached Damascus, was so thoroughly acquainted with its northern neighbours that it used the Aramaic script in lieu of the Arabic script, as the inscriptions showed; their chief male deity, Dushara, became identified with the Greek god Dionysus, and Allat with Aphrodite and Tyche.

The heterogeneous quality of the trading posts, in which so many divergent religions resided in harmony, is believed to have influenced the way in which the Daughters of Allah were worshipped. Palmyra, in particular, was a cornerstone in our investigation because at this metropolis, outside Arabia proper, Allat (the Arabian goddess most documented there), 'underwent changes';²³⁴ confronted with the leading goddesses of the Near

²³³"The influence of Babylonia upon Tema, especially in religious matters, was certainly strong." Cooke, Text-Book Of North-Semitic Inscriptions, 198.

²³⁴Teixidor, Pantheon of Palmyra, 56.

East, she became readily identified with them. The Arabs at Palmyra, we assume, recognized qualities in these foreign goddesses that were compatible with their own. Astarte, for example, was promptly assimilated with Allat presumably because the Arabs saw in the Phoenician goddess characteristics similar to their own goddess. Thus, it follows that an understanding of the goddess Astarte, i.e., the traits for which she was worshipped, could give us a better insight into the goddess Allat, in particular the capacity in which she was worshipped. From an examination of Astarte, as well as the goddess Atargatis, we hoped to uncover a common ground from which to construct a characterization of the Daughters of Allah.

What remains is the application of our reference material toward plausible conclusions as to the identity of the Daughters of Allah. On the basis of our research, it became apparent that some features of religious life predominated both in Arabia itself and in the adjacent regions. Restricting ourselves to these common features, we shall see to what extent they can be applied to the Arabian goddesses as a means of identification. The ones, then, that will occupy our attention are, the role of goddesses in religious life; the role of fertility goddesses, of which the mother-goddess is an aspect; and finally, the astral aspect of religious life. In conjunction with this foreign element is, of course, the equally significant Arabian element which uniquely influenced the characterization of the Daughters. As far as possible, we shall attempt to differentiate between the

two.

It has been observed that in ancient Near Eastern religions, the importance of goddesses exceeded that of gods. Aside from Allah, the Daughters of Allah at the time of the Prophet appear to have been the most venerated deities in Arabia. While others are mentioned, such as Wadd, Suwa, Yaghuth, none were as prominent nor influential as the Daughters.²³⁵ That this was the case is evident from the ensuing attack on the Daughters upon the advent of Islam. Allah's chief rivals were not other gods, but goddesses. And the influence these goddesses exerted was not restricted to the vicinity of Mecca, as we have seen; rather, they were revered throughout the peninsula. This phenomenon appears, as well, in Phoenicia, Syria, and Babylonia where the goddesses Astarte, Atargatis, and Ishtar far surpassed the male gods in importance. This worship of goddesses in preference to gods over so widespread an area of the Semitic world agrees with Smith's theory regarding the original matriarchal organization of society.²³⁶ Where women functioned as leaders, female deities likewise assumed leadership reigning over men and over all other gods. When the organization of society changed to a patriarchate, the male deity assumed supremacy over the tribe and over all the gods.. In Arabia, Allah was a senior god, or, 'high

²³⁵Kalbi states that none of the five idols mentioned in the Qur'an (71.22-23) were held in the same regard "or anything approaching it" as the Daughters. Ibn al-Kalbi, Book of Idols, 23.

²³⁶Hitti, History of the Arabs, 26, and Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte" both concur on this idea of early societies.

god' as Watt refers to him, long before the arrival of the Prophet. His ascendent position is indicated in the role of 'intercessors' the Daughters performed on his behalf. However, in spite of his superior status, his position seems to have been titular much like El in Canaanite mythology. In actual practice it was the goddesses to whom the Arabs addressed themselves.

What compelling factors, then, maintained the preeminence of the goddesses in the Near East, in spite of the subordinate role women moved into? Smith has suggested that it has to do with the "emotional side of Semitic heathenism"²³⁷ that arose out of associations with maternity, as well as, associations of a more sensual kind. In other words, fertility cults (with all that that implies) occupied so fundamental a part of ancient religion that the female deities, who were central to these cults, remained indispensable as long as they fulfilled this basic need in the lives of the ancient Semites. The overwhelming reliance of man on fertility in nature, and therefore on fertility goddesses who were seen as the source of fertility in nature, would have given the goddesses an importance not shared by the gods.

The fertility goddesses of the Near East, whom we have examined, need no further documentation to confirm their importance in this respect. What is less clear is whether or not the Daughters of Allah functioned in this capacity. Beginning with Manat, there is the evidence from the etymological study of

²³⁷Smith, Religion of the Semites, 59.

her name. If Manat derived from the cognate root M N Y, there is good reason to believe that she was at one time worshipped as a goddess of fertility. Watt has suggested that in spite of the resemblance of her name to 'fates', Manat was probably an agricultural deity.²³⁸ He bases this on two premises: the first having to do with a rock at the centre of her shrine on which he does not elaborate; the second, on account of the "Manat-names", for example, Zayd-Manat "the increase (given by) Manat".²³⁹ Her worship, he argues, was relevant to an agricultural community, but, when the Arabs became instead desert dwellers, she ceased to have meaning for them. Manat's association with the god Dushara might also indicate that she was a fertility goddess if he, as the sun, was a fertility god.

Of the goddess al-Uzza, there is mostly circumstantial evidence to indicate that she was a goddess of fertility. Ephrem Syrus, a Christian writer, referred to al-Uzza as an adulteress at whose festivals virgins prostituted themselves;²⁴⁰ Syrus compares her to Ishtar, infamous for her wild orgiastic worship. Barton, too, mentions "Patristic references"²⁴¹ that allude to an impure worship of Arabian goddesses. While the goddess al-Uzza is not specifically named in these "Patristic references", the authors would likely have had knowledge about the practices of

²³⁸Watt, "Pre-Islamic Arabian Religion," 78.

²³⁹Ibid.

²⁴⁰Winnett, "Daughters of Allah," citing Ephrem Syrus, 128.

²⁴¹Barton, "Hierodouloi".

the Arabs of the north (as opposed to the south) where in fact al-Uzza may have originated. Hence, al-Uzza who was in the vicinity where such cult practices were renowned, may have been one of those goddesses of impure worship so often associated with goddesses of fertility.

Al-Uzza's association with the sacred spring Zamzam is also suggestive of her having had her roots in the fertility cults. Much has been speculated on in previous chapters concerning the role of sacred water in connection with goddesses of fertility. Atargatis was identified by her sacred fish and ponds, and her cult practices largely revolved around water; 'Athtar/Astarte, is linked to subterranean irrigation and is thought to have originated as a spirit of springs. The importance of water to desert dwellers cannot be overestimated: "To the spring man and beast owe their lives in the arid desert."²⁴² Water as the abode of the deity was therefore the very essence of "divine life and energy".²⁴³ The goddess, then, who presided over a sacred spring or well, like Zamzam, possessed the means to create and sustain life where otherwise death existed all around. In light of this, al-Uzza's particular identification with this sacred spring, which to the present day is considered holy, may be reason for thinking she functioned at some time as goddess of fertility.

That Allat functioned as a goddess of fertility is highly probable, in spite of the absence of concrete evidence, given the

²⁴²Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

²⁴³Smith, Religion of the Semites, 173.

background of the ancient Near East. If the emphasis in the religions of the surrounding territories (Canaan/Phoenicia, Syria, Babylonia) on fertility cults was so pronounced, it is only reasonable that primitive Arabian religion would have had a similar emphasis. One of the popular theories concerning ancient Arabia is that many thousands of years ago it was an arable land where agriculture provided a viable means of livelihood for its inhabitants.²⁴⁴ As in Phoenicia or Syria, then, the deities most highly venerated would have been those associated with the fecundity of the land. Watt, an advocate of this theory, writes, "The traditional material about all these deities [Arabian] suggests that they had originally been agricultural deities comparable to the Baals and Astartes of Syrian religion..."²⁴⁵ There is an inscription bearing the proper name Zaid Allat "increase (bestowed) by Allat",²⁴⁶ "increase" generally referring to crops or cattle or some fertility-related commodity.

Especially in the north where she is generally thought to have represented the sun, Allat likely was worshipped as a fertility goddess. In an agricultural society such as in the northern areas,²⁴⁷ the sun was regarded as one of the essential ingredients necessary for the germination of the seedlings into a

²⁴⁴Hitti, History of the Arabs, 14.

²⁴⁵Watt, "Pre-Islamic Arabian Religion," 78.

²⁴⁶Noldeke, "Arabs (Ancient)"

²⁴⁷"The Sinai has almost always been partly under cultivation." Starcky, "Arabia".

fruitful harvest. Allat, as goddess of the sun, therefore, would have been recognized as the agent responsible for the fertility of the fields and in turn for the life of the inhabitants.

That Allat was known at Palmyra as a goddess of fertility is evident from her assimilation with Astarte, as well as her relationship with Baal, god of fertility. This identification in Syria may have been the more easily made if she were already regarded in this manner in northern Arabia. The Arabs of Palmyra, who initially brought her there in the first century B.C., presumably from Arabia, probably knew her as a goddess of fertility and consequently had no difficulty in associating her with the Phoenician goddess of fertility.

A common representation of Semitic fertility goddesses was that of mother-goddess, i.e., the one aspect seemed to imply the other. The goddesses Astarte and Ishtar, for example, were worshipped as mother-goddesses; the Canaanite goddess, Asherah, who was venerated throughout Arabia, was especially known in this capacity. By association, the Daughters of Allah could have assumed this characteristic where they came into contact with Asherah, for example, at Elath, Teima, or in South Arabia. According to Barton, "among the pre-Muhammadan Arabs the worship of the mother-goddess was practised; in some places she was called Al-Lat, in others Al-Uzza."²⁴⁸

Aside from foreign influence, it is possible the mother-goddess in Arabia arose as a natural reflection of the human

²⁴⁸Barton, "Hierodouloi".

condition. Just as matters of fertility (i.e., reproduction in nature) were the domain of the woman ('mother earth'), so the concerns of domestic welfare were as well. In South Arabia the great mother-goddess, Asherah, also called Harimtu by the Sabaeans, "was also in all probability universally known as Ilat..."²⁴⁹ That the Arabians had their own mother-goddess, by whatever appellation, is in keeping with ancient Semitic tradition. It will be recalled that 'Athtar, the South Arabian Venus deity, was referred to as "the mistress mother-'Athtar" and the "giver of children".²⁵⁰ Despite the problem of gender, this title implies that the primitive 'Athtar functioned as a mother-goddess. Assuming the goddesses Allat, al-Uzza, and Manat were at one time known as fertility goddesses, they too were probably worshipped in the capacity of mother-goddess.

The astral nature of religion in the ancient Near East is our other area of common emphasis. The term 'astral' is often used in describing Near Eastern religious systems, for example, the astral triads of South Arabia and Babylonia (sun-moon-Venus). While these systems seem to be unique features of Semitic religion, our focus shall be on a more specific usage of astral, i.e., as it pertains to the planet Venus. From Babylonia to the Phoenician coast, from South Arabia to the Sinai, there is a marked prominence that almost appears as a Semitic predisposition to the worship of the Venus star.

²⁴⁹Hommel, "Arabia".

²⁵⁰Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

Outside of Arabia we have seen Ishtar in Babylonia, Astarte (Aphrodite) in Phoenicia, and Allat/Astarte in Palmyra associated with the Venus star. Most conspicuous in Arabia in this capacity were the deities al-Uzza and Athtar. Until now, it has been assumed that at Palmyra Allat's identification with the Venus star was the result of her assimilation there with Astarte. If, however, this astral identification was there to begin with, i.e., native to her, Allat too might have been worshipped in Arabia in this capacity. If this were the case, it could account for the greater honours bestowed upon Allat and al-Uzza as opposed to Manat, "the third, the other."²⁵¹

Referring back to chapter three, we alluded to the possibility that the goddesses al-Uzza and Allat were epithets ('the strong one' and 'the goddess') of the Venus deity, Athtar, before they assumed individual identities. If Allat was an early epithet of Athtar, the Venus star would have been a visible part of her iconography, familiar to the Arabs of the north, and thus would account for the star on her tesserae at Palmyra. To better understand this theory, we should first determine her initial association with the southern god Athtar.

As stated, Athtar is thought to have originally functioned as a fertility deity, numen of the spring, in keeping with an agricultural community. With climatic changes, however, the fertile farmlands became desert wastelands, and the ancient Semites were forced to seek out their existence elsewhere. With

²⁵¹Qur'an 53.20.

their dispersal into outreaching areas, the deity Athtar, while retaining some of his/her identifying qualities, naturally adopted new characteristics as required by the changing situation. Thus it happened that in Babylonia, for example, Athtar (Ishtar), along with fertility, became identified strongly with the planet Venus; in Phoenicia, Athtar/Astarte may or may not have assumed this identity, depending on different theories. It is conceivable that in the north, Astarte, unlike Ishtar, was not identified with Venus; this planet may have had little significance to the ancient settlers whose needs were of a different kind. Only at some later time was this characteristic attributed to her, more, perhaps, as a symbol of her universality than as an immediate necessity. In Arabia, i.e., South Arabia, Athtar became known in the capacity of the Venus deity almost to the exclusion of everything else; a residual trace of his old days of fertility god could be found in his representation of the evening star, whereby he was the deity of life-giving water (chapter three).

Knowing this divinity Athtar to figure so prominently in Near Eastern religions, her (his) absence in northern Arabia is especially puzzling considering the importance of Athtar in the south, and considering the accessibility of the south with the north via the caravan highway. We have seen evidence that Atar (Atar-Samain) was known in the north; in fact, a list of gods

worshipped by the Arabs at Adumantu (Duma) is headed by Atar.²⁵² It is, therefore, quite difficult to imagine that Atar-Samain disappeared in the north, exclusively. Rather, there are many who maintain that Atar-Samain, Venus, was called by the appellations al-Ilāt, the goddess, and al-Uzza, the Strong One. Starcky, one of the protagonists of this theory, writes, "Venus, seems also to have been designated by the appellation al-Ilāt, the Goddess...an appellation that was afterward widely accepted"; further on he states that the Lihyanites venerated Ilāt (Venus) and "this goddess first appeared under the name of Uzza, the very strong one."²⁵³ Similarly, Paton comments " In North Arabia the original name of the goddess [Ashtar/Athtar] was displaced by titles such as al-Lat, 'the goddess', or al-Uzza, 'the strong' ".²⁵⁴ He goes on to say that this deity, recognized as the planet Venus, was called al-Najm, 'the star', par excellence, and is the goddess referred to in the Qur'an: "By the star when it setteth."²⁵⁵ Consequently, al-Uzza, the goddess supposedly to whom the Qur'an refers in connection with 'the star', is really a title of the anonymous Ashtar.

Because the goddesses al-Uzza and Allat were so adored in the north, their importance there could have stemmed from an

²⁵²Starcky, "Arabia". An inscription records that the king of Duma invoked 'Atar-Sam'.

²⁵³Ibid.

²⁵⁴Paton, "Ishtar".

²⁵⁵Sura 53.1

original identification with the illustrious Ashtar/Athtar. This latter was most likely feminine as was Ishtar and Astarte, hence the feminine gender of al-Uzza and Allat, her epithets.²⁵⁶ This would explain how the goddesses al-Uzza and Allat were females yet the god whom they represented (in the south), was male.

This very attractive theory explains the strong presence of a female Venus deity in North Arabia, viz. al-Uzza; in addition, it corresponds with Winnett's proposal that al-Uzza and Allat originated in the north, although not especially Sinai or Syria; finally, it provides a further explanation for Allat's ready assimilation at Palmyra with Astarte.

One other interesting feature of this theory is that it gives a new meaning or interpretation to the warrior aspect attributed to the goddesses we have examined. As noted in chapter three, Athtar (Ashtar), as the morning star, was characterized as a warrior deity; in chapter five, Drijvers referred to al-Uzza as "the martial aspect of the Arabic Venus Star"²⁵⁷; Allat, at Palmyra, was depicted in warrior garb. The goddesses Astarte, Atargatis and Ishtar, without much question, were venerated, in some respect, as warrior goddesses. If these deities had connections with the planet Venus, whether ancient or recent, their function as warriors could be an integral part of

²⁵⁶ "This is the gender in all the Semitic languages except South Arabic and Moabite, and therefore is probably primitive. It corresponds with early Semitic social organization." Paton, "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte".

²⁵⁷ Drijvers, Cults and Beliefs at Edessa, 152.

that connection. In Semitic astral triads, where Venus and the sun were closely related, it was thought that the role of the Venus star was to accompany the sun across the heavens serving as military escort and divine protector; hence the "martial aspect" of Venus. Conceivably, this divine prototype assumed the human figure of the armed warrior in earthly representation. The characterization, then, of al-Uzza or Allat as warrior goddesses could have arisen from this analogy.

Whether the goddess Manat was in any way associated with the primitive Ashtar remains unexplored judging from the silence in regard to her. There are quite acceptable reasons for believing that her position in the triad, (Daughters), was as ancient as that of Allat and al-Uzza, possibly even stemming from an original connection with Ashtar. One consideration is that, as a fertility deity, she may have been worshipped alongside of Ashtar, or as some special aspect of that fertility deity. We have presented evidence that indicates she may have been an agricultural, and, therefore, a fertility deity. Manat, then, like the goddesses Allat and al-Uzza was an early Semitic fertility deity in association with, or arising out, of the cult of Ashtar.

Another possibility is that Manat evolved out of her original personification of the element 'fate', which was one aspect of the mother-goddess Ashtar. According to a theory

proposed by Langdon²⁵⁸, fate was an intrinsic characteristic of ancient Semitic mother-goddesses. The title minu, menu, "fate", was used to address Ishtar: "Goddess of the fate of refusal" and "Goddess of the fate of consent".²⁵⁹ The Babylonian Menu appears as Meni in Canaanite mythology in connection with the mother-goddess Astarte. His conclusion is that "this mythology concerning the Babylonian mother-goddess and Fortuna, Tyche, Fate, is common to the Semitic religions of all Western Asia."²⁶⁰ The Arabian goddess of fate, then, Manat, was originally an aspect of the primitive mother-goddess Ashtar; evidence of this early relationship between Fate and the mother-goddess can be found in North Arabia where the mother-goddess Allat is habitually represented as Tyche. Subsequently, Manat came to represent an individual reality, her original identification with Ashtar having faded into nonexistence.²⁶¹

There is one other simpler, but equally provocative, theory, concerning the identity of the Daughters of Allah, whose tenets have formed a steady undercurrent for this thesis. That theory is that, following ancient Near Eastern tradition, the Arabian goddesses evolved from their ancestral Canaanite predecessors. A

²⁵⁸S.Langdon, "The Semitic Goddess of Fate, Fortuna-Tyche," Royal Asiatic Society, (Jan., 1930):21-29.

²⁵⁹Ibid., 26.

²⁶⁰Ibid.

²⁶¹"Divine epithets tend usually to become proper names, disguising the true personality of the deity." Teixidor, Pagan God, 37.

constant element of ancient pagan religion was the divine family (husband/wife dichotomy) whose purpose was the proliferation of sons and daughters; after all, fertility in nature was the basis for all religion. In the Canaanite pantheon, El, the ancestral deity, with his wife Elat (Asherah), were the originators of all life, and together produced a large family of gods and goddesses. Taking into consideration the elasticity of relationships that allows wives to become daughters and fathers, husbands etc., can we not project a parallel situation in Arabia? In reference to a past argument, we proposed that the Arabian Allah was a natural extension of El, and consequently, Allat could be considered a natural extension of Elat. Where Elat functioned as the wife of the 'high god' in Canaan, in the Arabian pantheon she moved into the position of daughter (Allat). Consistency was never a problem in ancient mythology. Allah, like El, occupied an ascendent position in the background, his importance being overshadowed by his wives/daughters. Allat, Manat, and al-Uzza, as his daughters, were the most favoured deities, just as Astarte, Anat, and Elat/Asherah were in Canaan, as long as pagan religion was based on fertility cults. When necessary, the daughters acted as intercessors to the supreme deity, Allah (El), when his attention was required. The Daughters of Allah, then, were the Arabian parallel of their Canaanite precursors functioning in much the same capacity as the principle goddesses of the ancient Near East. Their position in pre-Islamic Arabian religion, continuing the parallel, was unrivalled in spite of the

nominal 'high god' Allah, until the demise of paganism.

In favour of this theory, we have shown with consistency the prevalence of Canaanite religion throughout Arabia: in South Arabia where the worship of Asherah was prominent; in most of the major trading centers ("Elath"), where Canaanite deities were worshipped alongside of indigenous ones; in Palmyra where the temple of Baal was erected on land owned by Arab tribes suggesting a longstanding affinity. In consideration of the degree to which Canaanite religion was not only active in Arabia, but, as well, replete with deities of considerable resemblance to Arabian deities (Allah/El, Allat/Elat, Athtar/Ba'al), there is much to recommend this proposal. Undoubtedly, the simplicity of this theory is extremely appealing. In such an uncontrived manner it identifies the Daughters in their natural setting, perfectly suited to Semitic tradition and in harmony with the religious history of the Near East.

In summary, the Daughters of Allah would appear to have been worshipped in Arabia from a very early date. They far exceeded in importance all male deities before the rise of Islam, when Allah replaced them. Their origins, very likely, were as agricultural (i.e., fertility) deities but ceased from this in the face of major changes in climate that shifted the emphasis in worship from fertility to astral.

Relying on Arabian sources exclusively, our conclusions as to the Daughter's identity would be considerably curtailed. Other than their names, we are given very little information

about their worship. There are some indications that Allat was a sun goddess, possibly a fertility/mother goddess; the frequency, however, of the inscriptions naming her indicates her popularity, and, therefore, her importance. Al-Uzza, from her name especially, we assume was venerated as a Venus deity and was popular mostly in the north. Manat is very obscure. Aside from word derivatives of her name, we have few clues as to who she was.

Palmyra, from where the entire ancient Near East opened up to us, was pivotal to our research. Unknown dimensions of the goddesses were discovered here. Associations with Astarte, Atargatis, Ishtar led us to believe that the Arabian goddesses were part of a common Semitic heritage. The result was that by incorporating what we knew of the goddesses from Arabian sources with what we knew of their counterparts in the adjacent regions, new possibilities emerged; that is, where predominant features of religious life were evident in Canaan, Phoenicia/Canaan, Syria, and Babylonia, similar features were likely to have been known in Arabia. On the assumption that a commonality of worship, based on a commonality of human needs, existed in the ancient Near East, we postulated various identifications for the Arabian goddesses. Keeping in mind the wide diversity of opinion in this field of interest, statements made in regard to the Daughters of Allah are at best tentative; in the absence of critical data (for example, mythological texts as were discovered at Ugarit), the identity of the Daughters of Allah will probably remain as

elusive as the Arabs for whom they existed.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Albright, William, Foxwell. From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process. 2d ed. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1967.
- _____. Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths. The Jordan Lectures, 1965 Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968.
- Arberry, Arthur J. The Koran Interpreted. 2 vols. combined in 1 vol. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955.
- Astour, Michael C. Hellenosemitica: An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965.
- Attridge, Harold W. and Robert A. Oden, Jr. Philo of Byblos: The Phoenician History. The Catholic Biblical Quarterly: Monograph Series, 9. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981.
- Bosworth, C.E., E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, and Ch. Pellat, eds. The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986. s.v. "al-Lat," by T. Fahd.
- Caquot, Andre, and Maurice Szyner. Ugaritic Religion. Iconography of Religions, XV, 8. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980.
- Cooke, George Albert. A Text-Book of North Semitic Inscriptions: Moabite, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Jewish. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1903.
- Cowan, Milton J., ed. A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic. 4th ed. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979.
- Dahood, Mitchell J. "Ancient Semitic Deities in Syria and Palestine." Studi Semitica (Rome), 1 (1958): 65-94.
- Della Vida, Giorgio Levi. "Pre-Islamic Arabia." Edited by Nabih Amin Faris. The Arab Heritage. New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1963.
- Drijvers, H.J.W. The Religion of Palmyra. Iconography of Religions, XV, 15. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976.

- _____. Cults and Beliefs at Edessa. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980.
- Edwards, E.S. "A Relief of Qudshu-Astarte-Anath in the Winchester Collection." Journal of Near Eastern Studies. vol. 14-15 (1955-6):49-51.
- Glueck, Nelson. Deities and Dolphins: The Story of the Nabataeans. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965.
- Hastings, James, ed. A Dictionary of the Bible. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906. s.v. "Ashtoreth," by S.R. Driver.
- _____. 1913. s.v. "Atargatis," by H. White.
- _____. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1913. s.v. "Canaanites," by Lewis Bayles Paton.
- _____. 1914. s.v. "Hierodouloi," by George A. Barton.
- _____. 1915. s.v. "Ishtar," by Lewis Bayles Paton.
- _____. 1917. s.v. "Arabs (Ancient)," by Th. Noldeke.
- _____. 1918. s.v. "Ashtart (Ashtoreth), Astarte," by Lewis Bayles Paton.
- _____. 1918. s.v. "Atargatis," by Lewis Bayles Paton.
- Herodotus. The Histories. Translated by Aubrey de Selincourt. Great Britain: Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press), Ltd., 1981.
- Hill, George Francis. "Some Graeco-Phoenician Shrines." Journal of Hellenic Studies. vol. xxxi (1911):56-64.
- _____. Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum. Edited by Arnaldo Forni. Bologna, Italy.
- Hitti, Philip K. History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present. 10th ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979.
- Houtsma, M.Th., T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, and R. Hartmann, eds. The Encyclopaedia of Islam. Leyden: E.J. Brill Ltd.; London: Luzac & Co., 1913. s.v. "Arabia," by F. Hommel.
- _____. 1934. s.v. "Uzza," by Fr. Buhl.
- _____. 1936. s.v. "al-Lat," by Fr. Buhl.
- _____. 1936. s.v. "Manat," by Fr. Buhl.

- Izutsu, Toshihiko. Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an. McGill Islamic Studies, 1. Edited by Charles J. Adams and John A. Williams. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966.
- James, E.O. The Cult of the Mother-Goddess: An Archaeological and Documentary Study. London: Thames and Hudson, 1959.
- Kalbi, al-, Ibn (Hisham). Kitab al-Asnam. [Book of Idols] Translated by Nabih Amin Faris. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952.
- Kapelrud, Arvid S. The Violent Goddess: Anat in the Ras Shamra Texts. Oslo, Norway: Universitetsforlaget, 1969.
- Kassis, Hanna E. A Concordance to the Koran. Berkeley and Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1983.
- Langdon, S. "The Semitic Goddess of Fate, Fortuna-Tyche." Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (1930):21-29.
- Lucian. De Dea Syria. [The Syrian Goddess]. Text and Translation 9: Graeco-Roman Religion Series, 1. Edited by Harold W. Attridge and Robert A. Oden. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976.
- McDonald, William J., and James A. Magner, Martin R. P. McGuire, and John P. Whalen, eds. New Catholic Encyclopaedia. New York, St. Louis, San Francisco, Toronto, London, Sydney: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1967. s.v. "Arabia," which includes "Paganism in North Arabia," by J. Starcky, and "Paganism in South Arabia," by A. Jamme.
- Oden, R.A., Jr. Studies in Lucian's De Syria Dea. Harvard Semitic Monographs, no.15. Edited by Frank Moore Cross. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977.
- O'Leary, De Lacy. Arabia Before Muhammad. New York: AMS Press, 1973.
- Oxtoby, Willard Gurdon. Some Inscriptions of the Safaitic Bedouin. American Oriental Series. Vol.50. Edited by Ernest Bender. New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Society, 1968.
- Rostovtzeff, M. "Hadad and Atargatis at Palmyra." The Archaeological Institute of America. Vol.xxxvii (1933):58-63.
- Roth, Cecil, and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. Encyclopaedia Judaica. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971. s.v. "Ashtoreth," by Tikva S. Frymer.

- _____. 1972. s.v. "Canaan, land of," by Bustany Oded.
- Ryckmans, G. Les Religions Arabes PreIslamiques. Bibliotheque Du Museon. Vol. 26. 2nd ed. Louvain: Publications Universitaires and Bureaux du Museon, 1951.
- Smith, W. Robertson. Lectures on the Religion of the Semites. Burnett Lectures 1888-89. The Fundamental Institutions, First Series. New ed. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1914.
- Teixidor, Javier. The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- Von Grunebaum, G.E. Classical Islam. Translated by Katherine Watson. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970.
- Watt, Montgomery W. Muhammad at Mecca. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1953.
- _____. "Pre-Islamic Arabian Religion." Islamic Studies. Vol. 15 (1976): 73-79.
- Winnett, F.V. Study of the Lihyanite and Thamudic Inscriptions. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1937.
- _____. "The Daughters of Allah." Muslim World. Vol. 30 (1940): 113-30.
- Winnett, F.V. and W.L. Reed. Ancient Records from North Arabia. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1970.