CHAPTER ONE

THE SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND OF EARLY ISLAM AND THE HISTORY OF ITS PRINCIPAL CONCEPTS*

In this study, I intend to treat of various concepts typical of early Arab life and connected with early Islamic doctrine. In order not to exceed the limits of a brief survey, I have been compelled to confine myself to certain basic notions, illustrative of the ideological and psychological background of primitive Islam.

A. "Murūwah and Din"

According to the accepted view, there exists a sharp contrast between the spiritual and ethical foundations of pre-Islamic Arab life and the religion founded by Muḥammad. It was Goldziher who, in his study "Muruwwa und Din" (Muhammedanische Studien, I, p. 1-39), placed this view, which had been current before, on a scientific basis.

Goldziher was undoubtedly correct in interpreting murūwah as "virtus" 1 (cf. below, p. 322), but the contrast he tries to establish between this concept and din, in the sense of "Islamic religion", 2

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1 This translation had already been given in De Goeje's Glossary of Muslim b. al-Walid’s Diwan, p. LXVIII.—In this connection, I would mention an expression frequent in early poetry, but hitherto disregarded. The names of certain persons are frequently preceded by al-mar’u, as al-mar’u Nūh (A’sā Maymūn, no. 79, v. 28), al-mar’u Kīrā (Tabarī, I, 5; 2434, 15), al-mar’u Tubba‘ (Hammāsat al-Buḥtūrī, no. 1059, v. 4), also al-mar’u Ḥāmād = Muḥammad (Ibn Ḥišām, p. 995, 10), etc.; cf. further Hebrew hārēš Mōšē "the man Moses". I have no doubt that al-mar’u is to be understood here in an emphatic sense: "one possessed of murūwah"; it must be assumed that the abstract noun al-murūwah is derived from al-mar’u in this specific application. The emphatic meaning of al-mar’u developed from the simple meaning in much the same way as futan "hero, knight, fighter" (compare futūwah) developed from the simple meaning "young man, vir".
2 On the lines laid down by Goldziher, Tor Andrae (Die Person Mohammeds in Lehre und Glaube seiner Gemeinde, p. 210) speaks of a sharp contrast between the "Gesellschaftsethik des altarabischen Stämmewesens" and the "individualistische Moral des neuen din". I question the particularly individualistic character of the concept din in early Islam, without being able to discuss details here; for the time being, see below, p. 34.
has never been convincingly demonstrated. In my opinion, such contrast does not exist at all. Goldziher cannot deny that the principle known as *muruwah* played an important part even in Islamic days (*ib.*, p. 14). In fact, it is one of the main ideals of Islamic religion: *lā dīna bi-lā murūwatin* "there is no religion without *muruwah*", i.e., manly virtue and the virile ethics of the heathen period were appreciated even in the Islamic period, only that in the course of time other qualities, of purely religious character, were added to them.

Goldziher tries, of course, to substantiate his viewpoint by certain utterances of Muḥammad’s contemporaries, allegedly testifying to the wide gulf between the spiritual and ethical conceptions of pre-Islamic paganism and those of Islam. I do not propose to discuss each single passage adduced by him, but confine myself, for the time being, to examining one particular source to which Goldziher attaches considerable importance in the conduct of his argument. I, too, regard this source as highly important, as it confirms to a large extent my own view, diametrically opposed to his.

Goldziher (*l.c.*, pp. 9-10) says: "... Bekehrte sich also jemand ehrlich zum Islam, so bekannte er sich zu Tugenden, die dem arabischen Sinne als Niedrigkeiten galten. Keine echte Araberseele mochte in das Aufgeben ihrer angestammten Tugendideale willigen. Als die Frau des Helden ‘Abbās b. Mirdās erfuhr, dass ihr Gatte sich dem Propheten anschloss, verwüstete sie ihren Wohnsitz ¹ und kehrte zu ihrem Stamme zurück und an ihren ungetreuen Gemahl richtete sie ein Rügegedicht, in welchem sie unter anderem die Worte ausspricht:

Bei meinem Leben, wenn du dem Din Muhammeds folgst, und die Getreuen und Wohltäter verläßest,

So hat diese Seele Niedrigkeit für Hochsinn eingetauscht am Tage
da die scharfen Schwerter an einander geraten."


(1) *'alam yanha 'Abbāsa bna Mirdāsa 'annani* *ra'aytu l-warā mahṣūsatan bil-fagā'i‘i‘i*

¹ Qawwadat baytahā: This expression must be translated "she pulled down her house (tent, hut)"; cf. Hassān b. Ṭābit, *Diwān*, no. 29, v. 6; Ibn Ḥuṭaybah, *Kit. al-Ši‘r waš-Šu‘arā‘*, p. 337, 5; Dü r-Rummah, no. 42, v. 1.