Al-Sàm is the name given by early Arabic sources to Israel-Syria, north of the Arabian Peninsula, the land of the biblical stories. Babylon is usually mentioned as the 'birthplace of Abraham' but there are also local traditions that tie his birth to Syria. I therefore used the wider term 'al-Sàm'. In order to understand this phenomenon we should consult the literature dealing with holy places or with the Holy Land in which we can trace the competing references between al-Sàm in the wider sense of Syria and Israel, and Syria alone, and between the number of prophets buried in the district of Palestine as opposed to the number of prophets buried in the district of al-Urdunn (which then included Tiberias), and even a narrower meaning of al-Sàm: Damascus. This is the reason for the popularity of the †adîΔ al-Sàm—Sàmàt. See: Ibn aAbd Rabbih, al-aIqd al-Farîd, Beirut, n.d., VII, p. 243. The competition between the different references appears when each storyteller tries to glorify his place and claims that Abraham was born there. We can see it, for example, in the book of: al-Rubāì, Fadî‘îl al-Sàm wa Dimaq, Damascus, 1950. A vast literature has grown around the competition between holy places, and I will mention only a few of the sources: Ibn al-àwzi, Fadî‘îl al-Quds, Beirut, 1979; Burhân al-Dîn al-Bîqâ‘î, al-Plûm bi-Sin al-Hejâ‘a âld l-Sàm, Beirut, 1997; ‘Abd al-Razzâq al-Dîmâzîq, Hadîq ‘îl al-Înâ’în fi fadî‘îl al-Sàm, Beirut, 1989; al-Ma‘qîšî, Fadî‘îl Bayt al-Mugâsid wa l-Galll wa Fadî‘îl al-Sàm, Sâfa’anm, 1995; Sams al-Dîn al-Suyû‘î, Ihâf al-A‘jûsî bi-Fadî‘îl al-Mugâsid al-Aqî‘î, Cairo, 1983-4; al-Arzaqî, Alhâ‘î Makkâ wa ná fihâ min al-Àldr, Beirut, 1969; ‘Abd al-Salâm al-Sulâmî, Taṣû‘îh Abî al-Islâm fi Suknà l-Sàm, Jerusalem, 1940; Mu‘gîr al-Dîn al-Hanbâlî, al-‘Uns al-Galll bi-Tà‘rîfî al-Qûds wa l-Galll, Amman, 1973, etc.

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known and used in medieval sources, but I intend to use them as tools for analysis in the table given below.

We cannot claim that there really are three different images of Abraham. It will be more accurate to define them as different parameters that can be used to identify more easily the components upon which the analysis will be based. In general, identifying a personality using a geographic parameter is a tool that is commonly used by researchers. In each one of these 'characters' (the circles of Abraham's stories), there is a different pivot of interest:

1. When the center of the events is in Babylon, the interest in Abraham is for the sake of stories revolving around the prophet's discovery of the fact that there is a universal God (in an autodidactic way, while watching the sun, moon and stars rise and set without human influence), the war against idol worship and the victory of monotheistic belief which will be elaborated later.

2. When the center is in Israel, it is the biblical pivot. It is relatively small (it usually interests the Bible, and has very little interest for Islam) and we encounter only two or three episodes. The story of the binding of Isaac which appears in the Bible in the Israeli circle is transferred very easily by the Muslims to Arabia where, according to their belief, it became the binding of Ishmael.

3. When the center of events is the Arabian Peninsula, Abraham is a Muslim Arab. The interest is in Abraham the Arab and his image as the perfect prophet and a Muslim.

With this said, I want to re-emphasize that even though we see the life story of Abraham developing from different sources, he appears from the literary point of view as a person with a coherent life story. I will try to analyze the image of Abraham in the Arabic narrative and its various components, the sources of influence upon it, the needs it was meant to answer, and its goals. This can be done both from the literary and religious points of view.

In a large group of Abraham's stories we notice a strong inclination to strengthen the story with religious-literary aspects and to connect it

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2 The article about Job in Islamic tradition is an example of a use of a geographic parameter. J.P. Legrain, "Job dans la tradition islamique", BEO, 37-38 (1988), pp. 51-114. This is a regular process in research that deals with anthropological issues, including the essential need (up to the present time) to divide each phenomena according to space and time.