

HAND AND FOOT SYMBOLISMS: FROM ROCK ART TO THE QUR'ĀN*

BY

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Abstract

Wedded to creativity and spirituality since the dawn of humanity, the symbolisms of the hand and the foot have assumed many religious and artistic forms. This essay explores the artistic and religious significance of the hand and foot in the prehistoric rock art of North Africa and Arabia and examines their various ethnographic and mythological expressions in historical times. It then shows how these symbolisms were restructured in the Qur'ān to fit a strictly iconoclastic monotheism. It is a multidisciplinary approach to a collective consciousness that finds its roots in an Afroasiatic substrate and its expression in the artistic and linguistic traditions of the eastern and southern coasts of the Mediterranean.

Introduction

As pointed out by M. Arkoun, “[c]urrent Islamic thinking ignores the anthropological approach to the religious dimension,” and Islam continues to be based on the false assumptions that “religion descends (*tanzīl*) vertically into history, escaping, in its essence, the mechanisms of social existence;” that language is functionally fixed to those foundational semantics which God used in the Qur'ān; and that Salvation is in the identification of worldly history with legal institutions (Arkoun 1982, 173). All the while, archaeological reconstruction undermines the historicity of religions events; linguistics challenges the sacred status of languages; sociology casts new lights on the transcendence of religion; anthropology points to the parallels among various religious beliefs; history of thoughts outlines the similarities between various theological and philosophical systems; and psychology unveils the deep motives of our religious inclinations. All this poses an enormous epistemological challenge

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for Islam and calls for “une théorie de l’interprétation du récit mythique” (Id. 103) in which mutually reinforcing interpretations of symbols converge to create a worldview where man’s existential and ontological conditions are sustained by an imaginary that defies *les prétentions démystifiantes de la raison raisonnante et même les faits massifs de l’histoire réelle*—a theology liberated from traditional dogma (Id. 13; 1994, 38-9; and 1984, 10-11). Happily, in this confrontation between faith and reason, the modern scientist is very much like the mystic in his or her ability to make a definite distinction between man’s psychosomatically-based emotions and his or her inner leaps in search of Being (Arkoun 1982, 174). What follows is a discussion of how this realm of the “transcendental aesthetics” is revealed through the symbolism of the hand and foot in Islam.

I. *The Hand*

Long ago, Paleolithic people sought and found a soothing comfort to their esthetic and mystical urges in drawings of the human hand and footprint, which they ceremoniously painted and carved on cave walls at Gargas (France), El Castillo (Spain), La Cueva de las Manos in Pantagonia (Argentina), Kenniff Cave (Australia), Asir (Arabia), and the Tassili (Algeria). Amazingly, the first thing which Henry Cosquer saw on that July day in 1991 when he entered the submerged cave he discovered at Cape Morgiou, near Marseille, was a hand stencil—the oldest in the world, we are told (Clottes & Courtin 1996, 14). It was an epiphanic reminder that the hand is the first part of the human body that humans discover at birth.

1. *The Hand in the North African and Arabian Rock Arts*

Engraved and painted hands are found in many places in North Africa, including the Saharan Atlas and the Central Sahara (Leclant et Huard 1980. Fig. 176; Le Quellec 1992: 66-7; 1993, Figs 86:1-3, 94:1-5 and 95:1-5). Both J.-L. Lajoux and H. Lhote, early pioneers of rock art, reported the existence of art works, including the sign of the hand at Jabbaren, Ti-n-Tazarift, Sefar, and Wadi Athal in the Tassili, Algeria (Lajoux 1963: 84; Lhote 1973, Figs. 54 and 56). A multitude of negatively painted hands, or stencils (the technique of spraying the paint with the mouth over a hand placed against the rock), at a site near In-Djerane (Algeria), has earned the place the name *Grotta delle mani*

“The Cave of the Hands” (Sozzani and Negro 1989, 100). Hands also cover the wall of Auis I in the Acacus, Libya (Mori 1998, Fig. 141). Close by, near the Takharkhori pass, the walls of a shelter display people, animals, and two prints of the left hand. Faleschini and Palmentola called this site the *Hunters Shelter* (1993, 199, Figs. 17 and 19). In the Ennedi, at Elikeo III, G. Bailloud (1999, 26) found a pair of painted hands, one executed with flat red-violet, the other, outlined. Handprints are also found in Upper Egypt and Nubia (Cervicek 1986).

Along with other signs, the hand is usually found associated with people and animals. At Wadi Djerat, an engraving of a handsome cattle wearing a collar (a sign of domestication) and facing left is flanked by a large, well-incised left hand and a foot, while many other footprints are scattered all around (Muzzolini 1995, Fig. 61). At Oua-n-Chems in the Algerian Hoggar, Soleilhavoup (1993, Fig. 60) found a painted scene that included two stylized human dwellings, occupied. Present in front of each dwelling, were a pair of hands, a pair of sandals and dots. Near Bou Semghoun, Frobenius (1965, Fig. 83-7) found two engraved hands, along with other signs.

A curious depiction of the hand is found at Wadi Ziga, where a hand is seen with a disproportionately long index finger extending over a giraffe (Le Quellec 1992, 67). A similar figure of the hand with an extended finger is also found among a set of later (Camaline Period) engravings (Le Quellec 1993, Fig. 89-3). At Wadi Tarut, in the Fezzan (Libya), there is a set of hands superimposed over two cattle facing each other. Two of these hands have four fingers, and one hand, only three. The fourth hand is barely visible (*Id.* Fig. 89-2). At Tibesti, some hands are also missing a finger (Leclant & Huard 1980, 447; also Sozzani and Negro 1989, Fig. 2).

Among the paintings of the Tassili, Amadou Hampaté-Ba recognized many of the Fula rituals, including the Kumen initiation into the mysteries of pastoralism (*silatigi*). One of the scenes at Ti-n-Tazarift depicts the *lotori*, or annual lustering of cattle. There, painted on the side of a scene of people bathing cattle and passing them through a U-shaped brush gate, is a large abstract design representing the *kurgal kaggu*—a ritual veil, an important symbol to the Fula herders, the Kaggu (Le Quellec 1992:60-6). Shaped like a hand, it invokes the ancestral *Kikala*, with the four fingers, each painted in one of the colors of the cattle (yellow, red, black, white), representing the tribal clans (Dyal, Ba, So, and Bari). The thumb represents their vassals (Dieterlen 1965, at 325).

Published works also indicate that the hand is well represented in

the Arabian rock art. In Saudi Arabia, at Jebel Qara, southwest of Umm Ruqai'ba, numerous engravings and inscriptions can be seen surrounding a cave on a rocky cliff. They include two female figures with long hair and raised arms. Included also is the palm of a hand (Anati 1974, Fig. 150). Hand and foot prints are also documented at Butainah and other areas in the Tabuk basin (Livingstone et al., 1985, 133-4). In the Dhofar, Oman, the paintings of Wadi Darbet Cave include ibex, oryx, horses, camels, riders, various signs, and a handprint (Nayeem 1996, Fig. 35). Handprints are also found at Jebel Khudra near Hajar bin Humayd in Yemen. Elsewhere, at Jebel Ligashir, near the Rub' al-Khali, there is an engraving of two men engaged in combat, judging by the shield and the crossing lances (Jung 1991, Fig. 11). Two handprints can be seen at the foreground, while two other handprints and a forearm are behind the fighter on the left side. Many of the inscriptions at Wadi al-Aqabih in Yemen are accompanied by handprints. An inscription, *HYB*, is found accompanied by handprints (Jung 2993, Fig. 6). A pair of hands in northwestern Hijaz are also found with Thamudic (ancient Arabic) inscriptions (*Atlāl* 9, Pl. 120).

One the most striking scenes in Saudi Arabia is the series of four extended forearms with open hands placed next to a set of four bearded human faces (Anati 1972). Found in an engraving in the Asir Mountains, these faces bear an uncanny resemblance to the "Horseman" engraving in Kabylie (Algeria). A left forearm is also found in Najd near Musumma, superimposed by a later addition of lyres (Anati 1968, Pl. XXXIII). At Batna, near Khaiber, human arms were found depicted on the vertical face of a small, lonely rock lying in the sand. Drawn up to the shoulder, the arms on this rock end with open hand and stretched fingers (Kabawi *et al.*, 1990, 36).

Hands with forearms are also found in North Africa. Both left and right forearms are present next to, or overlaying, animal figures. A set of stylized hands with forearms are reported at Yagour in the Moroccan High Atlas (Rodrigue 1999, Fig. 4). At Sefar in the Algerian Tassili, an engraved forearm is seen covering a rhinoceros (Lajoux 1963, p. 86). At the same site, a right hand with forearm also covers the end of the forelegs of one of the right-facing caprids (Lajoux 1963, p. 86; Lhote 1973, Fig. 56). At Taferiest, a left forearm covered with spots, in the Iheren style that characterizes some of the paintings in the area, eerily stands alone (Lajoux 1963, 87). Amongst the worshiping figures of the Round-Head paintings of Taferiest, there is also a large hand with its forearm atop an unidentifiable animal (Le Quellec 1992, 71). The most

elegant forearm, with a hand opening like a budding flower, is found at Tadjelamine (Lajoux 1963, 174).

Interestingly, a golden pendant in the shape of a right-hand forearm similar to those depicted in rock art was recovered with other grave goods in the Eastern desert of Egypt. Dating to the fifth millennium B.P, it was buried with a middle-aged female (Sadr *et al.* 1994, 73). And as Le Quellec (1992, 70) has pointed out, there is a significant resemblance between the hand with forearm in the Saharan rock art and those found on the Punic steles. The hand was also used by the Garamantis as funerary steles in the extensive cemeteries of Wadi al-Agiel, in the Fezzan (Daniels 1975, 250, Figs. 3, 42, 43 and 49). A hand-shaped offering table was the preferred funerary furniture in the Garamantian tombs, which date to the first century AC.

The hand is also a key element in scenes depicting contacts between people and animals in the Saharan Atlas, the Central Sahara, the Nile Valley and in Arabia. They are paintings and engravings where people are seen touching the head or back of the animal (Leclant & Huard 1980, Figs. 152-156; Le Quellec 1993, Figs. 135-142) or even its sex (Albada & Albada 1992, Fig. 8-1:1). The animal being touched can be either wild or domesticated. They include elephants, giraffes, rhinoceros, cattle and even a crocodile (Jelinek 1985, Fig. 39-40; Le Quellec 1992, 65).

Not infrequently, too, people are depicted with arms raised up, sometimes facing domesticated or wild animals. This attitude is either a hieratical position or the attitude of an "orant" (worshipper) (Le Quellec 1993, Figs. 90, to 93; 1998, 512-513; Cervicek 1986; Jung 1993, 148). The rock art is replete with orants, but the most dramatic display of this attitude is in a Round Head painting known as the "Grand Dieux de Sefar" in the Algerian Tassili. In Arabia, orants and people with "hands outstretched, large and overemphasized" are also found in many places (Jung 1993, 148). In what may help us understand some of these figures, an isolated orant at Jebel Awrad in Yemen is found with an ancient South Arabian inscription which has been translated as follows: "*he, Sarhum, of the family Barium, respects and protects in obedience to Dhat Hymian.*" As noted by Jung, this inscription associated a universal ethical duty with the Sabaeen sun goddess (Id. 148). But a religious attitude cannot always be imputed to people with raised arms; some may very well be performing a dance or imitating cattle horns (Le Quellec 1993, 308).

One striking engraving of the Messak, Libya, is a scene of two seated peoples performing a hand-shake. It was discovered by the Belgian rock

art researchers Axel and Anne-Michelle Albada (1996, Pl. 9), who called it *Pact sur fond d'ovaloide à copule* or "Pact next to an ovaloide." These ovaloïdes are also found associated with what has been referred to as the "genealogical woman," "open woman," *femme ouverte*, or *Venus accueillante*. It is an engraving of a woman with open and flexed legs, and a cupule or a natural fissure in the supporting rock representing her sex (Leclant & Huard 1980, Fig. 170; Le Quellec 1993, Fig. 132). What is interesting is Albada's suggestion that the graphism of the "open women" can easily evolve into a scutiform (a shield), an anchoriform (anchor), and even a chiroform (a stylized, if not a normal, hand)—all patterns identified among the motifs decorating the saddle of a cattle and the dress of the woman holding it (Albada & Albada 2000, 70; 1996, 153, Pls. 6, 7).

The five-point star is also represented in rock art, though not as frequently as the hand. Trost (1997), for example, reported the existence of few engravings of the five-point star in the Hoggar, including a pair of stars (Fig. 300); a single star next to spirals (Fig. 689); and a star by itself (Fig. 639). Trost also reported a pair of stars of David (Fig. 273). A star is also found at Alamasse, Libya (Lutz & Lutz 1995, Fig. 84). In the Marrakesh region, Rodrigue (1994, Fig. 369) found one five-point star. Remarkably, and just like the hand, the five-point star is also found overlying a bull (Trost 1999, Fig. 117), a testimony to the pentadactylism which connects the hand and the star. A connection between the hand and the five-point star is also indicated in the Gerza Palette showing stars at the end of the horns and ears of a cow's head that is so stylized that it even looks like woman with uplifted arms (Arnett 1982, Pl. XXX).

It is not an exercise in biology, but the relationship between the hand and the star and stellar patterns is found in our evolutionary background. A key to the evolution of our human ancestors is the adaptive changes which the hand underwent, keeping the pentadactyl pattern but repositioning the fingers so as to allow for grasping. The culmination of these changes was a "hand-brain complex,"—a process of co-evolution of the hand and brain which initiated and drove human development (Wilson 1998, 161). Once we became *Homo sapiens*, the five-fingered hand began to point the way to a pentadactylism that has since become the archetypal foundation of many aspects of our cultural and artistic life, and even the structure of our thinking which already depends of the five senses.¹

¹ Thus, in grammar, the predicate was divided into five categories: *genus*, *species*,

2. *Current Interpretations of the Hand in Rock Art*

The religious significance of the rock art in North Africa and Arabia is widely recognized (Mori 1990-1991; Camps 1988; Muzzolini 1995a; Le Quellec 1993; Anati 1974; Cervicek 1986; Hachid 198; and Jung 1993), but the reading of the religious meanings of this art varies, depending on whether the emphasis is on the ritual function, psychological meaning, or structural significance of the selected rock art work (Ries 1994, 42). It also covers a wide range of religious interpretations, including the hunting magic (Jelinek 1984; Huard and Leclant 1980); fertility (Muzzolini 1995; Le Quellec 1995a); even hieros gamos (Camps 1997); Totemism (Lhote 1970); initiation (Hampaté-Ba 1966; Albada & Albada 1996); shamanism (A. B. Smith 1993); and various structuralist views (Hassan 1993; Soleilhavoup 1996, Tauveron 1996). Although they tend to reflect the dominant intellectual perspectives of the day and current trends or fads (Dickinson 1990, 125), these different rock-art interpretations are usually categorized as follows: the hunting or

diferencia, property, and accident (Afnan 1958, 93-4). Aside from the issue of whether they represent a linguistic analysis or an ontological interpretation (Edel 1982, 97-8), and intuitive though they may be, the number of Aristotle's categories is ten, a multiple of five (substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, posture or situation, state or condition, action, passion). The Euclidean geometry, which until the nineteenth century was considered to be the only geometry, is based on five axioms or unproved assumptions regarding space (homogeneity, infinity, continuity, immutability and causal inertness; *Encyclopedia Britannica* 19:929). The founder of modern empiricism, John Locke, saw the objective world as an aggregate of five primary qualities: solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number (Hamlyn 1987, 172). William James (1981, vol. II, p. 220) identified five characters in human thought or stream of consciousness. Though demonstrably not compelling and even logically invalid, T. Aquinas (1225-74) established the so-called 'Five Ways' arguments for the existence of God (the Aristotelian prime mover, the efficient cause, contingency, optimum (goodness imply the existence of a best), and design or teleological argument). Schopenhauer reduced morality to five cardinal virtues which he derived from his insights into various Oriental philosophies, Sufism included. Reflecting his pessimism, they are the negation of five vices: lust, idleness, anger, greed and hatred (*On Ethics*, § 110). The Chinese also believed in five cardinal virtues: sympathy, justice, politeness, knowledge, and sincerity. The Torah, the Law of the Israelites, consists of the first five books of the Old Testament, also called the Pentateuch; and M. Weber set out five postulates for rational legal systems (Weber 1968, vol. 2, at 657). In music, the pentatonic scale, thought to be an early stage of musical development, is the basis of music in many parts of Asia, Africa and Europe. In art and in architecture, the pentagon and pentagram (five-pointed star) are also featured in many wondrous designs. In literature, the pentastich is a poem of five verses; and in sport, the Ancient Greek celebrated the pentathlon which included five events: running, jumping, javelin, discus, and wrestling. The modern-day pentathlon is still a five-day event.

sympathetic magic; rites of passage; shamanism; structuralism; the art-for-art theory; and ethnographic parallelism. Due to space requirement, only a summary of these interpretations as they relates to the symbolism of the hand in rock art is provided.

The hand in North African and Arabian rock art is generally thought to be either a propitiatory gesture connected with the hunt, or a pantomimic gesture expressing the desire to dominate and appropriate the beast. The hand is also thought to be a sign of domestication, an apotropaic symbol, or a contact with the spirit world. Hand gesturing is often linked to magical and fertility rituals or to hieratical performances. Only in one case, as we have seen, was the hand ethnographically related to a known human group, the pastoral Fula.

Reviewing various interpretations of the hand, Mori (1998, 207) concluded that “[h]and prints are found in the rock art of almost every continent and have been thoroughly studied and cataloged, . . . but the interpretations still offered are very diverse and hence unreliable.” Mori’s judgment may be severe, but the various interpretations of the hand are not without deficiencies. Most disconcerting, perhaps—and this applies to the hand as well as all other symbols—is the general view that the religiosity which presumably marked the early periods of the rock art underwent a loss, even a degeneration, during the subsequent pastoral period and beyond. Without going into the complicated issue of periodization, the rock art in North Africa and Arabia is basically divided into a pre-Pastoral Period (Hunters), Pastoral Period, and post-Pastoral Period (Horse, Camel, Epigraphic, etc.). Many authors believe that, in addition to the artistic changes from the earliest periods of the rock art (c. 5000 BC) to the latest ones, there was also a loss of spirituality over time. Thus, for example, Muzzolini (1995a, 222) thought that a definite break in the religious symbolism took place during the Arid Post-Neolithic (3,000-1000 BC). In contrast to the flourishing religious sentiment of the Ram of Boualem, the God of Sefar, the White Lady and the many symbols of this period, he said, the Pastoral (Final Bovidian) was marked by a total absence of symbolic scenes (Id., 227). With the arrival of the pastoral people of Ti-n-Anneuin and the Cabaline, he added, the spirituality associated with the therianthropes, gods and goddesses of the rock art gave way to the material values of the warrior, the “civil potentate” (Id., 229). Mori (1990-1991, 95) also laments the “desacralization” of the art shelter spaces during the Pastoral Period; and Hachid (1998, 255) bemoans the secularization of the art.

What these interpretations of the rock art overlook is the emergence

of alternative outlets for religiosity and creativity, such as music, decorated cloth and personal possession (e.g., saddle, head-rest piece), funerary preoccupation and the construction of stone monuments (Milburn 1993). Most importantly, these studies ignore the impact of the most drastic invention in human history, writing.² As Walter Burkert has indicated, one of the direct results of the invention of writing was a drastic reduction in the need for "interpreting signs," meaning that symbols, be they carvings or paintings, did not need to be created in the first place. Writing also decreased the need for personal involvement in paranormal, ecstatic, or mystical experiences (Burkert 1996, 178). It is not unlikely, therefore, that what is deemed a reduction in the artistic productivity and related ritual and ceremonial activities is merely an indication of the new creative attempts that eventually culminated in the invention of the *cuneiform* and the *hieroglyphic*, and, later in Arabia and North Africa, the *Sinaitic*, *Thamudic*, and *Tifnagh*. But that does necessarily mean a reduction in the spirituality of the peoples which found different forms of expressions.

3. *The Hand in Berber and Arabic Lore*

Remarkably, the iconography of the hand is supported in North Africa and Arabia by a rich nomadic lore that goes far beyond the usual reference to magic and fecundity. Most importantly, the hand is in this part of the world an important tribal symbol. Among the Berbers in North Africa, for example, the *tashalhit* word *afus* "hand" also means "tribal confederation." In *tamasheq*, the language of the Tuareg in the

² We do not know when prehistoric people began making use of complex abstract symbols, but what Cervicek calls the B-Horizon in his time-scale for the Egyptian rock art (4000-2100 BC) is rich in symbols such as bucrania, Z-signs, and other signs (Cervicek 1986, 82; 1992-1993, 45). Stars and crescents are also predynastic symbols. Much of the old abstract graphism of the Arabian and North African rock art remains undeciphered, but it may have played a role in the development of writing along suggestions made by Majeed Khan, who provides examples of what he called proto-Bedouin writing from Wadi Damm, near Tabuk, al-Ula in northwestern Arabia, and Raniya, southern Arabia. They each consist of a linear succession of human stick figures gesturing, circles, triangles and animals in stick-form. His theory is that these were a system of communication consisting in pictograms which later become "word signs" or logograms, paving the way for the Thamudic script. He dates this literary development to around 1200 BC. He even conceives of an independent and parallel development to the proto-Sinaitic (Khan, Majeed. "Recent Rock Art and Epigraphic Investigations in Saudi Arabia." *Proceedings of the 24th Seminar for Arabian Studies 24-26 July 1990*. 113-122, at 116).

Sahara, the term *tawsit* refers both to “tribe” and to the palm or base of the hand from which the fingers issue. Hence, Tuareg who are related to each other are said to belong to the same hand or *afus*. Clearly, the hand with its five fingers is, for the Berbers, a symbol of a tribal ideal and identity (Nicolaisen 1963, 141; Camps 1993, 121).

This association between the hand and tribal identity finds further confirmation in the quinary pattern which characterizes social organization and lineage denomination all across North Africa. Indeed, the numeral five (*khums* “fifth”) is used to refer to tribal segmentation among the Ait Atta of the Atlas, the Ait Ouriaghel of the Rif (Morocco), the Tashemas of Mauritania, and the Shawia of the Aures, in Algeria (Galand 1970; Hart 1967; Camps, 1993; Tillion 1993). Today, in Jebel Sarho, Morocco, two very valuable possessions of the Ait Atta tribe are kept in the custody of a *sherifian* descendent of Moulay Abdellah at the *qsar* (fortress) of Tin Iwursan: the tribe’s ancient war banner and a document written in Arabic script on a camel skin establishing the division of the tribe into five *khums*: Ait Wahlim, Ait Wallal, Ait Isful and Ait Alwan, Ait Unebgui, and Ait Aisa Mzim (see, *Encyclopédie Berbère*, vol. 7, pp. 1026-32, at 1030). A quinary segmentation has also been recognized by Lionel Galand in the Latin name *Quinquegentenei* which referred to the rebellious tribes from Kabylie that rose up against the Romans from 289 to 297 AD (Galand 1970, 297). Interestingly, the Berber cardinal system is also based on a quinary system with a combination of binary elements. Modern Berber dialects exhibit the original numerals 1 and 2, and very few have the original 3 and 4. From 5 onward, Arabic numerals are used. When reconstructed, the Berber cardinal numbers are 1 = masc. *yn*, fem. *yet*; 2 = masc. *sn*, fem. *snt*; 3 = masc. *krad*, fem. *kradet*; 4 = masc. *okkoz*, fem. *okkozet*; 5 = masc. *fuss*, fem. *fusset* [Shluh: *summus*, fem. *summust*]. From 5 to 9, a number is added to 5, so that 6 = *fuss d yn* (5 + 1); 7 = *fuss d sn* (5 + 2); etc. This quinary system of counting is also used by some Afroasiatic people (e.g., Beja, Agaw, Hausa), and the Fula (Dombrowski & Dombrowski 1991, 343, 360).

A quinary pattern is also reflected in the founding myth that traces the origin of all Berbers to one of the five sons of *yālūt*. A reflection of a common cultural substratum, this myth is similar to an ancient Egyptian cosmogonic legend, according to which five gods (Osiris, Horus, Seth, Isis and Nephertys) were the progeny of the ancestral earth-god Geb and sky-goddess Nut. The five gods were also born on five consecutive days (Strouhal 1992, 18).

It is not known how universal the quinary pattern of social structure is, but it has already been mentioned that the hand is an important tribal symbol for the pastoral Fula of the Sahel. A similar use of the numeral five for lineage denomination is also found in Arabia and even in Iran, among the Basseri tribes. Interestingly, in his *Works and Days* (Lines 90-204), the Greek Hesiod also conceived of the structure of the human society in quinary terms. Indeed, in his tale of how mortal men came about, Hesiod says that five races were created by Zeus: first, the golden race, then the silver race, the bronze race, the race of the heroes/demigods, and, finally, the race of men.

Segmentation, a modern rendition of Ibn Khaldun's concept of *ʿaṣabiyya*, is a social structure consisting of kinship-based communities organized according to a principle of boxed or nested lineages: each tribal group contains sub-groups, which in turn contain other subgroups. Segmentation is an existential requisite for a nomadic society, providing the bases for social organization, ideological flexibility and adaptability (Khazanov 1984, 142; Salzman 1999, 40). While segmentation allows clans and tribes to grow in size without diminishing group solidarity, egalitarianism and the diffusion of power, segmentation along a quinary pattern merely enhances and optimizes the ability of tribal societies to achieve greater cohesion and self-governance.³ This has been confirmed by a number of anthropological studies, including Ernest Gellner's study of the Berber tribes of the High Atlas, David M. Hart's study of the Ayth Waryaghar of the Rif, and Jacques Berque's study of the Saqsawa, to name only few. According to these studies, the *khums* system works remarkably well in providing viability for the tribes because it allows the mechanism of checks and balances, which is at play through the principle of *soff*, to operate efficiently. *Soff* (also called *liff*) is a pattern

³ As pointed out by Gellner (1995), aspects of the segmentary mechanism are also recognizable in many modern institutions and societies which operate based on ideologically-supported clientelism and patronage among different social groups and strata, such as in the collective bargaining systems where wages are not legally enforceable beyond the legally established minimum level. They are also present in the enforcement mechanism of the United Nation where five permanent members of the Security Council, wielding a veto-power and operating through a clientele system, are entrusted with managing world peace (Articles 41 & 41 of the UN Charter). Another indication of the suitability of the quinary structure for the management of autonomy is provided by the pentarchy system of governance of the early Catholic Church under five patriarchal sees: Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Rome. And it may not be at all impertinent to point out the rise in modern national politics of a "fifth power," the media, a phenomenon rooted in the development of democracy and the emergence of free speech.

of allegiance that splits tribes in opposed halves along alliances that are dictated by ongoing interests (Hart 1972, 33; Berque 1978, 424-433; Jamous 1981, 165). That the balancing *soff* works well within the quinary or *khums* system is due to the fact that it is structurally far more difficult to sustain a majority (of three) with a tribal constituency of five members than it is with a tribal membership of only three. This structural feature considerably reduces the chances of the rise of a dominant, repressive coalition. Allowing for a greater play of the balance-of-power principle, the quinary configuration is more conducive to the realization of a society which, in Gellner's words, is "a kind of inversion of Hobbes." That is, the more segmented a tribal society is, the greater the tribal equality, and the less likely Hobbes' government, or Leviathan. It is "une methode pour fractionner l'autorité" (Jean Farvet, cited in Jamous 1981, at 182), or, as Gellner again put it: "divide that ye need not be ruled" (Gellner 1969, 41). Interestingly, this is an exact description of the *siba*, a past social regime in North Africa, under which the reach of the government, or *makhzen*, was limited with respect to most of the tribes of the Atlas and Saharan Atlas (Gellner 1973, 4).

In North Africa, the quinary principle is also found permeating other aspects of the Berber culture. The Berbers, for example, often confine their music to pentatonic scales (i.e., scales using five different pitches within an octave) (Jenkins and Olsen 1976, 3). A clear example of this is the *tende*, a music which the Tuareg play during the camel-festival that takes place at the end of the summer rainy season—a period which brings the Tuareg of Niger and their camel herds to the In-Gall region for their *cure salé*. The rhythm of the *tendi n-emans*, or mortar drums, which are played at joyous festivities during these times, is characterized by a pentatonic structure. Also pentatonic in structure is the Moroccan *nuba*, "a suite of song in five movements, each one in five rhythmic modes performed in fixed order" (Wendt 1980, 585 and 546).

Mention has already been made of the quinary lineage denomination in Arabia. The truth of the matter is that the quinary patterns are far more pronounced in Bedouin societies, encompassing a great many aspects of their culture. Not only is the Arabic word *khims* (deriving from *khms*, "fifth") synonymous with "tribe" (see *Lisān*), but it also connotes a large spectrum of the essential activities supporting the life and existence of a nomadic tribe. Thus, for example, *khims* refers to a particular watering pattern for camels, usually once every fifth day. One of the rituals observed by pre-Islamic tribes was to sacrifice every fifth-born lamb to their deity (*al-Mukhassas* vol. 1. p. 90). A sheep that

gives birth to female-twins five consecutive times becomes sacred (*wasila*). *Khums* is also a term for the tribal leader's share in the loot and other rewards of raiding. Extending this martial imagery is *khamis*, another Arabic word for "army", which itself is organized in a quinary structure: middle, left, right, front, and rear. And what is a brave tribal fighter without a lance, the ideal length of which is five cubits.

'*Ashra*, the Arabic "ten," is a multiple of *khamisa* ("five"), but the relationship between these two numerals is more than mathematical. Not only does the term '*ashra* refer to a set of two hands, but it connotatively assumes all the symbolisms associated with the hand and the numeral five and amplifies their mythological, religious, magical, sexual and regenerative imports. Thus, for example, and just as *khms* refers to a watering pattern, so is '*ishru*, "the watering the camels every tenth day." The kinship import of the hand is captured in the word '*ashvrah*, meaning, all at once, a "mate" or "spouse," and a "large family" or "clan." This particular connotation of intimacy, association and community of the term '*ashara* is also known in other Semitic languages (e.g., Ugaritic '*shr* "to sacrifice", '*shrt* "a sacrifice, libation, communal meal"; Ge'ez '*ashara* "to invite", "offer a sacrifice"; and '*ashur* "dinner (with guests)") (Dombrowski and Dombrowski 1991, 372). *Ashirat* is the well-known Semitic deity.⁴ Back to Arabic, '*ushrā*' is a gravid mare or a she-camel, which, after bearing ten she-camels, becomes sacred and left free-roaming (*sā'ibah*). Her tenth-born one, called *bahira* on account of the earmark it receives, is also sacred and left free (Ibn Hisham, vol. 1, pp. 91-92). '*Ushur* is a "tithe." And '*āshūrā*' is a Muslim holiday on the tenth day of Muḥarram, which is of a particular significance to the *Shi'ites* on account of Husein's martyrdom on that day.

Both Arabs and Berbers were acquainted with the art of hand reading. While palmistry was banned under Christianity, hand reading flourished in the Arabo-Islamic world. Known in Arabic as '*ilm al-asārīr*, "science of the secrets", it included dactylomancy (use of hand rings), onychomancy (use of nails), and chiromancy. What is interesting is that

⁴ Curiously, there is a distinct hermaphroditic character to the ancient deity *Ashirat*, as it was a male deity in South Arabia, but a female deity in the North. What is interesting is that the hermaphroditic character of this deity may be reflected in the androgynous nature of the numeral '*ashra*, which is indicated in the syntactic treatment requiring, contrarily to the rule of correspondence, that the numeral ten and some other Arabic numerals be masculine in relation to a feminine noun, and feminine in relation to a masculine one.

the term *asārīr* (also *asīra*, *asrār*; sing. *sīr*) in *ʿilm al-asārīr* is also used to refer to the lines of the hands (*al-Mukhassas*, vol. 2, p. 6), features intimately known to man since the beginning of time, which indicates that the roots of palmistry in the Arab world must go very far back in time.

The hand motif was widely used outside rock art, especially as an amuletic object. Most notable is the popular *khamsa*, or what is referred to in the West as the “hand of Fatima.” This is the sign of the open hand seen in the form of jewelry, tapestry and pottery patterns, etc. It is also one of the signs of Tanit, the Punic deity and consort of Baʿl Hammon. It is found on many Punic steles, indicating a funereal significance (G&C Picard 1987, 155). Combining the same funereal and propitiatory powers are also the above-mentioned Garamantian hand-shaped steles and libation tables found in the Fezzan. The funereal powers of the hand, it should be added, were known all around the Mediterranean. To protect their dead, for example, the Etruscans painted the sign of the horned hand (a fist with cow horns) on the walls of tombs dating to about 500 BC (Morris 1999, 176). It is also a Jewish burial tradition that the grave of a person of a Levitic descent be marked with the sign of the hand.

The symbol of the hand is also part of the ancient Egyptian iconography and hieroglyphs, which have deep roots in prehistorical developments. Thus, for example, the Egyptian *ka*, a divine spirit of a person, is represented by two uplifted arms. The Egyptian amuletic hand was believed to confer the power of dexterity and manual agility (Andrews 1994, 70).

In some religious traditions, laying the hands on the head serves as a symbol of ordination, or to impart blessing. And in many cults, supernatural healing of the sick is the result of a transfer of wholesomeness through the hand touch (Burkert 1996). The ritual of the laying on of the hands is also a part of sacrificial cults. In the ancient rite of Yom Kippur, the Jewish people gained atonement by sacrificing a goat to Azazel, a legendary demon. To accomplish this ritual, the priest symbolically placed all the sins of the nation on a goat by laying both hands on its head and leading it into the desert (Lev. 16-8).

* * *

Remarkably, and in keeping with the quinary structure of primal thinking, Islam retained the quinary basis in shaping the sacred and in patterning many of its newly-established beliefs and rituals. The concept

of faith (*imān*) includes five components: "The belief in Allah, His Angels, Books, and Messengers, and the Day of Judgment." And the pillars of Islam are five: *shahāda*, or profession of faith; *ṣalāt*, or prayers, *zakāt*, or charity; *siyām*, or fasting; and *ḥajj* or pilgrimage. Daily, the *ṣalāt* is performed five times. The sacral status of acts and objects falls into five categories: free (*mubāḥ*), prohibited (*ḥarām*), mandatory (*wājib*), recommended (*maḥbūb*), and disliked (*makrūh*). There are five *meeqat* places marking the liminal boundaries of the sacred territory of Mecca, where Muslims coming to perform *Hajj* or *ʿumrah* (minor *Hajj*) enter into a ritual sacredness (*iḥrām*): Dhul Hulayfa, near Madina; Dhatu Irq, al-Juhfah, near Rabigh; Qarn al-Manazil; and al-Malamlam. In connection with *Hajj*, too, Islam designated five impure (*fawāsiq*) animals that may be killed even when a person is in a sacral state (*Iḥrām*) in Mecca, where killing is prohibited: scorpion, spotted crow, mouse, rabid dog, and kite (hidʿa) (Fahd 1966, 514, n. 2). In popular mythology, the five apocalyptic signs of the resurrection are the false messiah (*Dajjāl*), the coming of Isa (Jesus), the appearance of *Yājūj* and *Mājūj*, the coming of the beast and the rising of the sun from the west (Smith & Haddad 1981, 128).

II. *The Foot*

The agent of our mobility and freedom, the human foot is also a symbol of our destiny. When Mary Leaky went searching for our ancestral origins in East Africa, the answer was disclosed to her in a few lowly footprints on a fossilized path at Laetoli, in the Oldowan valleys of Tanzania. In the recently-uncovered fossilized footprint on a South African beach (*Science World*, Feb. 23, 1998, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 1-2), we could see our earliest *sapien* ancestor pacing along the African shores, a "proto-Columbus" casting eyes on the horizon in search of new continents to populate. In due time, one of his/her American descendents, Neil Armstrong by name, would leave behind, up there on the Moon, in the Sea of Tranquility, two human insignia: footprints, and an American flag. The flag will wither under the assault of cosmic elements, but the footprints will fossilize, a solid echo of Armstrong's herald: "it is a small step for man, but a giant step for mankind!" It is amazing that the means of our journey and passage is the symbol of durability!

Many stress bipedalism as the primary factor in the evolution of humans. Our feet, it is said, are our most human characteristic (Howells

1993, 51). Bipedalism allowed early hominids new adaptive behaviors: to see over the tall grass; to gather berries at the top of the shrubs; to display sexual attributes; to stand up in water; to minimize sun exposure; to be able to use tools, and so forth (Piero & Alberto Angela 1993, 45; Howells 1993, 72). Bipedalism is also said to be at the origin of the reproductive relationships which are characteristic of human societies; i.e., continuous (as opposed to episodic or cyclical) mating and a division of labor through which the male gathers food and the female raises children. This reproductive strategy allowed for a few children requiring intensive rearing, instead of many who are neglected (Lovejoy 1993, 15).

From an evolutionary point of view, the foot was once just like the hand in shape, feature and use, so that both have tremendous nerve linkages in the brain. This is why the sensory impulses received from the foot (such as tickling) are powerful stimuli. And though the underlying neurological reality is not understood, there is a strong association between the foot and sexuality. With varying explicitness, the sexual symbolisms of the foot and shoes have found different cultural expressions throughout the ages. For example, the earliest known brothel sign, Desmond Morris (1997, 102-3) tells out, is a 2500-year-old engraving from Ephesus consisting of a foot pointing to a pubic triangle. And marriage ceremonies in Ancient Egypt involved the exchange of sandals, a practice also known among the Tuareg of the Hoggar. Paralleling this practice is the old Anglo-Saxon custom where the groom had to tap the bride lightly with his foot on the head to signify his authority over her. Later, people began throwing shoes at the couple. In modern America, people tie shoes to the car bumper on wedding day (Ackerman 1995, 273). Finally, Sigmund Freud captured the erotic aspects of the foot and worked them into his psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams (Freud 1921, vol. 7, pp. 152-4, especially n. 2). His theory of foot fetishism is reflected in some of the fashion theories (Friday 1996, 461).

The purpose of this rather lengthy discussion of the sexual associations of the foot is to lay the ground for the interpretation, later, of some of the mysterious scenes in the rock art (e.g., the coit scenes), and some ritual traditions (e.g., the Biblical putting of the hand under the thigh).

But the symbolism of the foot is not limited to sexuality and eroticism. Foot symbolism encompasses various other aspects of life, death and power. As indicated on the Narmer Mace, where the Sandal-bearer is seen carrying a pair of sandals and a pot (Arnett 1982, Pl. LI), the

sandals signified sovereign power and regal potency in early Egypt. But the foot can also be a symbol of humility, even weakness. A brave warrior, Achilles was vulnerable in the heel from which he was held to be dipped into the waters of the River Styx.

1. *The Foot in North African and Arabian Rock Art*

Like the hand, the foot has an uncanny capacity for capturing powerful symbolism. And like the hand, the foot is used as a rock art motif, either by itself or in combination with other signs. In North Africa, footprints are found in the Central Sahara, Tibesti, Ennedi, and Nubia (Leclant & Huard 1980, 176; Cervicek 1986). A cattle at Wadi Djerat is flanked by a large, well-incised left foot and a hand, while nine other feet are seen, one on the rear, one on the head, one on the belly area, and the rest all around. In the Libyan Desert, two footprints were incised next to an engraving of a cattle. Another set of footprints was drawn next to a sandal and a concentric design of cup-holes into which libation may have been poured (Cervicek 1986, Figs. 257, 160).

An extension of the foot, engravings of sandals are also found all over North Africa, even in the Canary Islands (Muzzolini 1995, 385 and Fig. 61; Le Quellec 1993, 52-1). One of the engravings at the Oukaimeden, in the Moroccan High Atlas, included three pairs of sandals, a decorated Bovid, a knife and an anthropomorphic figure with interesting (palmette-like) hands (Rodrigue 1998, Fig. 1). In Upper Egypt, Cervicek recorded about ten sandals, one handprint, nine footprints, eight shoe-prints, and one human leg (Cervicek 1986). Two of these sandals were lined up next to an antelope in the Ghubari Road (Id., 1992-1993, fig. 9). In one of the engravings at Nag Kolordona, sandals were engraved next to an ithyphallic man (Hassan 1993, Figs. 11 and 14). Along with the *tifnagh*, the sword, bowls and shields, the sandals constitute some of the recent art works by the Tuareg in the Central Sahara (Albada & Albada 2000, 59).

As indicated by Cervicek (1986), Livingstone et al., (1985) and Zarins (1981), vestigia are widespread in Palestine and Arabia. In Qatar, at Jebel Jusasiyah, five human feet were carved in the rock, two of which have clearly shaped toes. Eleven other feet are also found at al-Furaiha on the Island (Hawkins 1987, 54). In one of the few rock art examples provided by Nayeem from Wadi Darbet Cave, in the Dhofar of Oman, three ladies painted in red ocher and dressed in long robes can be seen standing with arms raised. Separating them are oval objects

that may be sandals (Nayeem 1996, Fig. 35). Another engraving preserved in Ajman Museum (Fig. 23, p. 281) includes a stylized group of people and, at the bottom, two oval shapes or sandals set near what looks like two amphora. In Qurriya, northwest of Tabuk, in Saudi Arabia, one of the rock surfaces is loaded with human and animal figures and many footprints with detailed toes (*Atlat* 9, Fig. 134). At Kilwa, in Saudi Arabia, Zarins noted that the foot of a woman in an engraved love scene has six toes (Zarins 1990, 52-3 and Fig. 11). Footprints are also found engraved in Yemen (Jung 1993, 141). A pair of feet in Wadi Yab'ath are similar to the ones from the Island of Socotra, where footprints are found associated with crosses in sites thought to be ancient Christian places of worship (Id. 144). Footprints are sometimes found with ancient inscriptions, such as the one at Saiq, in Wadi Mafia'a in Yemen. A slab which belonged to the Moon Temple at Hureida carries a footprint with a pre-Islamic inscription containing the word "Wadd'il has traced" (Id., 147). At Wadi Jirdan, a footprint is accompanied by a circular bowl carved in the rock (Id. 149).

One cannot discuss footprints and sandals without talking about those forms which are referred to in the literature as "ovaloides" or "ovales" or even "globules" (Le Quellec 1993, Figs. 155, 157; Leclant and Huard 1980, 1). These are oval or sub-rectangular shapes that are sometimes crossed by a line, dividing them into two compartments not always of equal proportion. Occurring with unusual frequency in the Messak (Libya), the ovaloides are found associated with domesticated or wild animals (elephants, rhinoceros, crocodiles, giraffes, equids, elephants, felines, a hippopotamus, a pelican, and fish (Albada & Albada 1996, Pl. 9; Le Quellec Figs. 155, 158). They can be found either surrounding the animal or superimposed onto it. There is even an ovaloide containing the profile of a human head at Tin Eneisnis. Sometimes the ovaloide provides the background, or *toile de fond*, for the scene depicted. The patina of the ovaloide is sometimes fresher, indicating a later addition to an existing engraving (Muzzolini 1995, 333).

The ovaloides are often identified as sandals, which is almost certainly true of those ovaloides with a dividing line in the middle and a dot or two in the toe area, such as those found in the Algerian Ahaggar (Trost 1997, Figs 207, 220, and 226; see also page, 312, Figs. 1421, 1422). But some ovaloides could also represent traps and nooses (Muzzolini 1995, 332; Le Quellec 1993, 463; but cf. Le Quellec 1998, at 83 and *passim*). Instances of these devices associated with trapped animals are reported by Trost from the Ahaggar (Trost 1997, Figs. 1419).

The meaning of many of the ovaloids is not clear. But we know that in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, the oval shape stood for land (Arnett 1982, 13). And according to some Tuareg, the ovaloids are signs of water, indicating the existence of wells or water holes (Albada & Albada 2000, 126). But the sexual significance of the ovaloids in association with animals, humans or therianthropes is also suggested. Muzzolini, for example, links the ovaloids in some of these cases to reproduction and fertility of both people and animals (Muzzolini 1995a, 224). This interpretation is borne out by the ovaloids found at Tin Erkini in the Messak Settafet, Libya, where the Albadas discovered a site containing two love-making scenes, which they christened *l'ombre du plaisir* or "shadow of pleasure" (Albada & Albada 2000, Fig. 18). One of these scenes includes an open woman, or *femme ouverte*, in coit with a man in a horizontal position. Two ovaloids are near the head of the man. This amorous action is surrounded by a luxuriously-saddled cattle and felines. Next to it, the other scene also includes a *femme ouverte* in coit with a man in a horizontal position, surrounded this time by antelopes and ovicaprids. Both the right foot and hand of the woman are in contact with a large ovaloid or sandal, reminiscent of an open woman with a trap at Mathendus (Muzzolini 1995, Fig. 448). Trost also shows an open woman being penetrated by a phallus next to a large ovaloid (1997, Fig. 668).

Even more dramatic is the depiction of the ovaloid as a symbol of life and fertility in a scene discovered in 1992 by Le Quellec and Yves Gauthier at Wadi Taleshut, in the Messak (Libya). There, on the top of a cave, and engraved in the naturalist style, is a parturient woman. To her left, there is a sheep with a double line extending from its sex area to an ovaloid (an inverse, U-shaped form). At the end of this line, which is thought to represent an umbilical cord, inside the ovaloid, is a small, two-lobed form, deemed a placental object. Farther to the left, a cattle is encircled within a triple line that is attached to another placental object, inside of which there is, delicately carved, an outline of a homunculus, or a small man (Le Quellec 1998, 380-1, Figs. 127, 130). The cave, cattle, woman and ovaloid in this scene exude a definite sense of regeneration.

Like the ovaloid, the foot and sandal also assume a sexual role, one that has been sufficiently documented in rock art. Thus, for example, sandals were engraved next to an ithyphallic man at Nag Kolordona. Two other sandals, with a groove between, gave the engraving a definite appearance of male genitalia (Hassan 1993, Figs. 11, 12). Mention has

already been made of the engraved love-making scene, where the woman's foot has six toes at Kilwa, Saudi Arabia.

The possibility that the ovaloides and the sandals may have served other purposes should not be discounted. Ancient and valuable as they are, sandals may have been used in prehistoric times as a means of exchange—precisely the role which, as we will see, sandals assumed in antiquity. Their presence in the rock art next to animals or a significant human interaction would simply mean that sandals were the preferred means of payment for cattle, brides, or sexual favors.

Sandals are also associated with prehistoric funereal practices in the Nile Valley and the Sahara. This is clearly indicated in funereal monuments such as the *idebnan* of Ahaggar, Algeria. Some of these funereal monuments include steles and stones/slabs on which sandals were engraved. In a tomb at Ti-n-Affelfelen, for example, a slab at the base of the structure bears the engraving of two sandals. A flat stone with a pair of sandals was also recovered from a funerary monument at Akkar (Camps 1997, 43-4; and Fig. 18). Two steles from a tumulus at Wadi Ti-n-Sharruma (Messak, Libya) were each marked by an ovaloid. So was the slab in another tumulus at Tin Ammoutin (Albada & Albada 1996, Pl. 9).

2. *Foot in Berber and Arabic lore*

In North Africa, the foot, just like the hand, is also surrounded by a rich lore. In what is perhaps a reflection of a dim memory of that primordial event, the birth of bipedalism, both Berber and Arabic cognates referring to "foot" are used to designate "man." The Berber *argaz* "man" is derived from the root-word *rgz* "to walk" (*Argaz: marcher au pas*; see Dallet 1982). In Arabic, both *rajul* "man" and *rijl* "foot" derive from the same root, *ʔjl*. Cognates with similar connotation also exist in other Afroasiatic languages (e.g., *grd* in West Chadic and Cushitic. See also Cohen 1969, 333; Orel and Stolbova 1995, 2113).

Sharing the root-word *ʔjl* in Arabic are also numerous other terms whose meanings are particularly significant in the context of the nomadic life. Thus, for example, *rijlatun* means a "herd of a wild game," a "swarm of locust" (important staple food), and a "stream." A dark horse or sheep with white legs is *murajjal* or *ajjal*. And *ar-rajilatu* is the ram which carries the shepherd's bag, which might shed new light on the decorated or crowned ram in the Saharan Atlas engravings. "Courage" is *njūla*; *irtajala*, "to improvise"; *rajlāʔ*, a "rocky land"; and *rājil*, a "patient

and enduring walker.” The expression *rajala al bahimah* means “to let a baby animal suckle its mother”; while ‘*ala rijli tā’ir* (“hanging on a bird’s foot”) is something fateful. And ‘*ala rijlin* is “to be in fear and dread” (*Kūtāb al-‘ayn*, 6:102-103; *al-Mukhassa*, 2:55, *Lisān*, vol. 5:155-160).

With respect to rock art, the term *rijl* may also be relevant to the interpretation of the ovaloides. As we have seen, some of these ovaloides have been interpreted as sandals or traps. Deriving from the same root word as *rijl*, the term *marjul* means “trapped by the foot” and refers specifically to game that has fallen into a trap or *ḥabla* (*al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ*, 8, p. 89). The emphasis in this cynegetic idea is on the foot (*rijl*), but the connotative reference is to the trap. Another aspect of the term *rijl* relates to animal tethering, which is widely evidenced in rock art and in the many scattered tethering stones. It is also important to point out here that related to foot is the Arabic word ‘*aql*, which describes a type of defect in the animal’s leg as well as a disease of the hoofs. Deriving from the same root is ‘*uqāl*, meaning the rope with which the foreleg of the camel is hobbled, which also applies to the rope that hold the Arabian *kūfiyya* on the head. Finally, ‘*aql* is also the Arabic term for “reason” (see Arkoun 1984, 137).

As to the power symbolisms of the sandals, it was mentioned above that the ancient Egyptians exchanged sandals during marriage ceremonies. To signify a transfer of authority, the father gave the groom his daughter’s sandal to indicate that she was now under the groom’s care (Ackerman 1995, 273). Some of this North African ritual may have survived in the Hoggar, where the Tuareg people make gifts of sandals during wedding ceremonies (Marceau 1978, 223).

Both ritual and sexual meanings of the foot and sandals are also suggested in the Arabic word *ḥidā’tu*, meaning “shoe” or “sandal” (*al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ*, vol. 4, p. 112; *Lisān*, vol. 3, 98). When used in the verbal form, this term becomes *ḥada’a*, meaning “to give a present or a gift” and “to bestow” a good, not unlike the Arabic term *qaddama*, which also means “to offer” and connotes pedal movement and forward motion. But it is the derived nominal term *ḥidyatu* which is charged with sexual and reproductive significance. This, for example, is indicated in the way in which this word is used in some of the Prophet Mohammed’s sayings. In one *ḥadīth*, the Prophet referred to the penis as mere *ḥidyatu* “flesh.” In another *ḥadīth*, he referred to his daughter Fatima as his *ḥidyatu*, meaning a part of his own flesh.

Another reference to the sexual/fertility power of the foot, yet, is

indicated in the tradition according to which Abraham was circumcised using an adze, the Arabic term for which is *qadūm*. Aside from sexual nature of the ritual in question, the word *qadūm* shares the same root as *qadam* (foot) and *quddām* “fore” or “front” (see *Lisān*, vol. 11, 69). It should be recalled that, in the ritual circumcision which took place on the eighth day in the Jewish rites, “the covenant was literally inscribed on the male member” of the community of Israel (Chidester 2000, 32). Later, when faced with the difficulties this ritual posed to the nascent Christian community, Paul would construct a whole Christian theology based on his interpretation of the flesh (*sarx* in Greek), thus transforming the Jewish tradition regarding circumcision, the law and membership in the Church.

But there is nothing particularly extraordinary about this coincidence between foot and sexuality in these Prophetic traditions. In the Near East, the lower-limbs have always had a sexual/fertility association. As pointed out by Ackerman (1995, 277), the Mesopotamians used the same word, *birku*, for both knee and penis. The sexual and fertility association of the foot in Semitic cultures is also indicated by the Arabic term *fakhd*, “thigh or leg,” which means clan, and, like the hand, has a segmentary significance. Sexual symbolism is also indicated in the Biblical oath which consisted of putting one’s hand under the thigh of the person to whom the pledge is given. When Abraham charged his servant to arrange for Isaac’s marriage, he asked him: “Put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that. . . .” (Gen. 24:2-3). Jacob also told Joseph: “If you really wish to please me, put your hand under my thigh as a sign of your consent . . .” (Gen. 7:29).

Further confirmation of the sexual/fertility connection of the foot is also found in the “stripping of the sandals.” This is a ritual prescribed for ending a levirate marriage (a conjugal relationship with a widowed sister-in-law), making the man who turns down the wife of his deceased brother and his lineage and his family “the man stripped of his sandals” (Deut.: 25-9-9; also Ruth: 4-10).

But, beyond the sexual innuendo, the symbolism of the foot, the leg, and the sandals in all these cases is simply an indication of the value placed on one’s life and the continuity of one’s lineage.

The Assyrians and the Hebrews used sandals as a pledge of good faith when they transacted (Ackerman 1995, 273). The custom of the ancient Hebrew was such that one party would take off his sandals in order to make a binding contract. The Hebrews also used the ritual

of casting off the shoe to signify various intentions of control and possession. "Upon Edom I cast my shoe," goes Psalm 108:9, meaning that a claim to the land is secured by the laying of a shoe over that land. The foot then becomes an important element of the Covenant between Israel and Yahweh: "If you will observe all these commandments . . . then Yahweh will dispossess all those nations in front of you, and you will dispossess bigger nations and more powerful nations . . . Every place in which your foot will step shall be yours" (Deut. 11:20-24).

Like the hand, the foot and sandals also acquired a funereal function and became symbolic offerings for the dead and symbols of the after-life. Mention has already been made of the engravings of sandals found on the ancient funereal monuments of Ti-n-Affelfelen and Akkar in Ahaggar, and others. Interestingly, in Ancient Egypt, actual sandals were offered to the dead. For example, an eighteenth-Dynasty workman named Kha was buried in tomb TT8 at Deir el-Medina along with three pairs of sandals (his wife had none). Mera, a Fifth-Dynasty priestess of Hathor buried at Deshasha, was found with two pairs, one of which was placed inside her coffin (Van Driel-Murray 2000, 312). This ancient practice persisted until fairly late. At Qsar Ibrim, in Nubian Egypt, Hans Barnard found a grave containing the remains of a mature new-born who was buried under the floor of a house. On the top of the baby lay a used sandal made of palm leaves. The grave dated to the post-Meroitic period, or the X-group (Barnard 1992, 47).

The symbolism of the foot also has a propitiatory and prophylactic value. Against the evil spirits which haunt their surroundings, Malika Hachid reports that the Tuareg invoked the sign of the foot (by engraving its outline) to secure passage without harm. In Wadi Djerrat (Algeria), there is an isolated rock called Adrar Issakharet. Here, it used to be a Tuareg tradition to make a wish and then jump to the top of this rock in one bound. At the Aba-n-Tenouart shelter, there is a footprint on the floor which is covered by a stone. In the past, the Tuareg used to uncover this footprint and pour a libation of butter onto it to bring about the fulfillment of their wishes. This practice was also found at Tin Teklet, where two footprints received similar libation each time the Tuareg made their seasonal move away (Hachid 1998, 270).

Often a symbol of supernatural powers, the foot is also at the center the mysterious art of tracking in North Africa. Rooted in empirical experience, the art of seeing revealing details in footprints left by a person or an animal is widely perceived to pertain to the domain of magic. Also related to this supernatural power of the foot is the aver-

sion among traditional North African societies to the sight of the sole of an overturned shoe.

Among the Arabs, genealogy is a very important tradition and is the subject of a great body of lore. One of the techniques of establishing descent among the Bedouin was the use a divinatory skill called *qiyāfat*, involving either the visual examination of the body of a person (*qiyāfat al-baṣar*), or the inspection of the footprint (*qiyāfat al-atar*). *Qiyāfat al-baṣar* places a great emphasis of the similarity in the feet of related people. One of the most notable cases involving the use of this type of *qiyāfat* took place in 664 AD, establishing the filial relationship of Ziyad Ibn Abih to Abu Sufyan, which was recognized by Muawiyya, now his brother and founder of the Umayyad Dynasty, the first Islamic history (Fahd 1966, 371).

The foot, just like the hand, is also a symbol of cosmic importance, connecting us to the universe. Physically overpowered by the force of space, we experience time only mentally, intuiting space changing its features around us as it moves, or as we move through it. To get a concrete sense of time, we tear space, break into pieces, and reduce it to our own measures, feet and cubits. In the process, the hand and the foot become a metaphor for time. It was not long ago that the *mu'addin* in a remote village in Algeria would measure the length of his own shadow in feet to estimate the time of *ṣalāt*. With technical progress, and before the electronic age, time was indicated on our watches by the “big hand,” the “middle hand,” and the “small hand.” And the classical verses of the English poetry are timed in feet and metrons.

Associated with the ancient stone cult of Arabia and North Africa, the foot and the hand became the mark of the Creator. Feet and sandals engraved on rocks, said Cervicek (1986, 96), represented the “striding of the deity” and marked the sacredness of the place. Nowhere is the spirituality of rocks and footprints as dramatically illustrated as in the recently-excavated temple of Ain Dara, Syria. There, two giant footprints, each three feet long, were delicately carved in the limestone slabs covering the temple portico. A single left footprint is carved on an adjoining slab at the threshold of the antechamber, while a single right footprint is carved on the threshold from the antechamber to the main hall. A prototype of a Canaanite temple, with feet proceeding through its three sections towards the “holy of holy,” this temple was discovered in 1954 and excavated in the 1980s by Ali Abu Assaf (Monson 2000, 20).

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, Muslims believe, is sacred because it symbolizes the heavenly journey of the Prophet (*mi'rāj*), and also because the Rock below the dome is blessed by his footprint. The shrine of Abraham in the Ka'aba (Mecca) is believed to be built where the Patriarch's footprint once existed. Reliquary stone with the Prophet's footprint or *qadam rasūl* are brought home by pious pilgrims, and *Shī'ite* Muslims also know of stones with the footprint of the venerated Ali (the fourth caliph) (Schimmel 1994, 3).

In Islam, the foot has retained all the symbolism it had known in the past. The washing of the hands and feet are part of the ritual ablution required for the five daily prayers. The removal of the shoes in a holy place, observed in the past so as to prevent defilement resulting from contact with impure things, is a practice still observed by Muslims. To mark the end of the past, and to enshrine a new era of peace and Islam, the Prophet pointed to his feet and said: "All past claims of blood, property, or vengeance are under my feet." On the Day of Judgment, Allah will put His foot over Hell-fire to put it out (Nasafi 1962, 387). Most significantly, and in honor of motherhood, "Paradise is [placed] under the feet of mothers" (Prophetic *ḥadīth*, or saying).

III. *Hand and Foot Symbolism in the Qur'ān*

The divine oneness, or *tawhīd*, articulated in the Qur'ān is a reversion to the primitive and absolute monotheism of Abraham. It is a concept that abhors idolatry and association (*shirk*) or polytheism such as existed in Arabia before Mohammed and which the Qur'ān characterizes as the worst form of unbelief (*kufṛ*) (4:48; 5:72). Most adamant in the condemnation of images (Burkert 1996, 166), Islam is a radical iconoclasm aimed at stripping God of the sensible and the visual. Yet the transcendent and absolute oneness of God (2:163) had to be elaborated beginning with the naive anthropomorphic images of God which the Qur'ān every so often invokes. To this end, the Qur'ān used terms, phrases, and parabolic images or *mutashābihāt* (Asad 1980, 989) to appeal to those "apperceptions and cognitions already recorded" in the nomadic experience and consciousness of life. In so doing, it tapped into the Afroasiatic imagination that inspired the sacred, the magical, the beautiful, the romantic, the erotic and the epic which we found depicted on the rocks of the desert, so that the symbolism and lyricism of those rupestrial images are ever-so-subtly redeployed toward a universal expression of the Abrahamic call to the one God.

And how recognizable are the symbolisms of rock art in the Qurʾān! Especially that of the hand and the foot. Indeed, it is not infrequent that the Qurʾān invokes these two symbols in all their ancient and various associations with the sacred. For example, to implore the believers to give charity as they consult the Prophet regarding a religious matter (58:12-13: “O ye who believe! When you consult the Prophet, offer up something in charity . . .”), the Qurʾān uses the hand to indicate the time or occasion of this charitable act (*bayna yaday*, “between the two hands”). This verse has been interpreted as a regulatory measure, imposing a requirement whose purpose is to reduce accessibility to the Prophet, whose time was valuable (Asad 1980, 846, n. 22). Regardless the metaphor is still an invocation of the offertory and propitiatory symbolism of the hand. This is further reinforced by an appeal to the libationary symbolisms of the foot (*qadam*), implied in the term *qaddam*, which, as we have seen, means “to offer.”

The magical or pantomimic powers of the hand which, in the Frazerian sense, are aimed at controlling and possessing the animal, or promoting the fertility of the herd, are also indicated in the Qurʾān, but with a twist. For example, the ritual magic which surrounds the hunt⁵ is clearly indicated in the Qurʾān, but it is also deeply disturbed and rearranged. Addressing the faithful performing pilgrimage, the Qurʾān enjoins: “O believers! Verily Allah will try you by means of a game which your *hands* and lances can reach so that Allah may distinguish those who fear him in secret . . . *Kill no game while you are in the sacral state of pilgrimage*” (5:94). And so, hunting, otherwise permitted in Islam (5:1), is specifically forbidden for Muslims within the sacred precinct of Mecca. But the hand, heretofore a propitiatory symbol of the hunt, is intentionally invoked and implicated in the negative nature of the injunction (not to hunt), a subtle way of divesting it of its cynegetic magic. The aim is to make the hand less of a cynegetic symbol and more of a metaphor for creation: “Do they not see that it is for them that We

⁵ Following the example of R. B. Serjeant’s book, *South Arabian Hunt*, London (1976), (Rodionov, 1994) published a study of the vestiges of the ancient hunt rituals in Hadramawt, and (Al-Mahi 2000) looked into signs for this hunt in the Omani rock art. J. Ryckman (1987, 110) also suggested that the ancient cultic practices of Arabia included a ritual hunt, *sd*, involving games consecrated to the various gods. Such a ritual hunt was, for example, performed by the ancient mukarrib kings of *Saba* to Venus, whose animal symbol is the gazelle, and to Kurum, another deity. He also suggests that the ibex hunt may have been associated with obtaining rain, a sort of *Istisqa* (“rogation for rain”), and was still practiced in Hadramawt until a few decades ago.

have created from what *Our hands* have fashioned: cattle of which they are now owners and masters” (36:71).

Nor is the Qurʾān at all prudish when it comes to the sexual symbolism of the hand or the foot. Rather this symbolism is fully displayed, and in a way that is reminiscent of even the most explicit rock-art scenes, like *l'ombre du plaisir*. Referring to marriage, for which it uses the Arabic word *nikāḥ* (literally, intercourse), the Qurʾān invokes the notion of a knot, a noose (*ʿuqdatu*). This is clearly indicated in 2:235 (*and to not proceed with tying the marriage-knot before the proper end is fulfilled*), and in 2:237 (. . . *or he, in whose hand is the marriage-tie, should remit*). Deriving from the the same root (*ʿqd*), the term *ʿaqd* (contract) is retained in Islamic law to refer to the “marriage contract” (*ʿaqd an-nikāḥ*). Now, it is not impossible to see in the tie of the marriage referred to in the Qurʾān an echo of the Saharan engravings of ovaloids next an open women or connected with copulation scenes. In abstract terms, the engraved ovaloid is not very different from the idea of a knot, or a noose implicit in the Qurʾānic term *tie*, the legal term *ʿaqd an-nikāḥ* (marriage contract), or even a modern wedding ring. They all convey binding such as, perhaps, suggested by the engraved *Venus acueillante* reaching with her hand to an ovaloide.

One of the most charged passages of the Qurʾān refers to the regenerative and life-giving power of Allah and His power to raise the dead. Naturally, these powers are metaphorically associated with the hand: “It is He who sends the winds as glad tidings before His mercy (*bayna yaday rahmatih*, literally, between the two hands of His mercy), till they bear laden clouds, which we drive to a dead land and cause water to fall therefrom, and we cause therewith all sorts of fruits to come forth” (25:48). In this image of life-giving power, the regenerative potency of rain is fully displayed, but the focus is on the unseen forces behind it, the winds, the direction of which can be sensed by the human hands, but which are driven by God’s Hands, bearing heavy clouds to the dead lands. What is striking, is the parallel of this symbolism to the way in which the invisibility of the supreme deity was realized in Ancient Egyptian iconography. As we know, the name Amon in Amon-Ra, the Egyptian god, means “hidden,” and to denote his invisibility, he was symbolized by two large feathers, which are on the top of the head of this deity. The feathers were chosen because they indicate the slightest motion in the unseen air—hence the divine presence. Amon is also represented painted in blue, the “color” of the air.

It seems ironic that, in its campaign against idolatry, the Qurʾān

would ask the following question about the false gods: “Do [idols] have feet wherewith they walk, or do they have hands wherewith they hold, or do they have eyes wherewith they see, or do they have ears wherewith they hear?” (7:195). But the use of this naive realism is simply to set up the false idols so that they are smitten and trampled over, elsewhere in the Qurʾān, by the All-Seeing, All-Hearing God, who Himself has a pair of hands with which He created Adam (38:75).

Thus, by stressing the concrete in order to highlight the unseen, the anthropomorphic images of God were incrementally abstracted and elevated to Divine attributes consistent with the conception of Allah. At the end of this transcendental “transamination” of symbolisms in the Qurʾān, the hand becomes a metonym for Divine power (“Glorious is He in *Whose hand* is the dominion of all things.” 36:83) and Mercy (*bayna yaday rahmatih* 7:57; 25:48; 27:63).

This elaboration of the symbolism of the hand continued in Islamic philosophy and theology, and the two hands with which God Himself created Adam (38:75) are the subject of an astounding mystical treatment in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom) of Muḥyi al-Din Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 1240). There, in the creative vision of Ibn al-ʿArabi, the two hands are the symbols of the polarities which characterize the world.⁶ And creation, an intricate dynamic of affinity and tension, is an act of self-consciousness, a realization of the truth expressed in the Prophetic tradition “I was a treasure, and longed to know, so I created the cosmos” (Austin 1980, 27). That is, in order to see His essences, or *aʿyān*, which are as multiple as His beautiful names, but united in His reality, God manifested Himself in the world. And to bring sharpness and focus to His reflection in the world, God breathed His spirit into it and Adam became the polished surface of the world. He was, all at once, the reflecting mirror and the eye seeing the reflection—“the sight of God” (Id. 50; Sells 1993; 127; Rauf 112). But God is also the unity of opposites: He is awe (*haybah*) and intimacy (*ʿuns*), benevolence and anger, the last and the first; the hidden and the manifest; beauty and majesty. An it is these oppositions in Himself which God calls His Two Hands. They are the symbols of the power to grasp

⁶ These mystical elaborations may be esoteric, but, amazingly, it is the Sufi teachings that molds the worldview of Muslims from differing cultures. Most influential in this respect is Bin ʿArabi. Bowen (1993) has recently documented how, for example, Ibn ʿArabi’s writing concerning the primordial Light of Muhammed’s light inform the discursive tradition of the Gayo of Indonesia and impact their beliefs and rituals.

(*qbd*), to expand (*basf*) and to give (*‘aṭā*), to forbid (*manʿ*) and to elevate (*rafʿ*), to place (*wdaʿ*) and to plead (*raḡā*). And it is with these two Hands that He created Adam, the perfect man, the complete being, the image of God (Sells 1993, 133; Rauf 1980, 141; Austin 1980, 55). In these two Hands, God encompassed Adam to honor him. From Adam, the one person (*nafs*), the human genus was created. God then put the universe in Adam’s left hand, and his descendants in the right hand (Rauf 1980, 157).

Ibn al-‘Arabi also made use of the pentadactyl symbolism of the hand in another mystical elaboration of creation. This is in his tractate titled *Shajarat al-Kawn*, where the universe is presented as a combination of the creative word (logos, the Qur’ānic *kun*, “Be!”) and the cosmic tree or *shajarat al-kawn*. Using the imagery of the Arabic script to create a correspondence between Adam’s body parts and the name MĤMD, Ibn al-‘Arabi attempted to transfer the logos theory (*kun*, the root of the tree) to the person of the Prophet Muhammed, the archetypical reality. In so doing, he imagined a world which, though monadic in structure, is replete with dyads, triads, tetrads, pentads, and a hexad. Seven pentads figure in this monadic world which insists on the association between the verities of Islam and the human body: the five stars of retrograde motion (the *khunnās* in 81:15, thought to be Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, Mars and Saturn), five things at the base of the hand (= five senses, five pillars of Islam), five right-hand fingers (the five *Rāshidān*), five left-hand fingers (members of the house of Mohammed *Ahl al-Bait*), the five right-foot toes (things assessable for legal alms), and five types of men (gnostic, believer, lover, disobedient, and sinner) (Ibn al-‘Arabi 1980, 23-4).

* * *

Just like that of the hand, the ancient ritual symbolism of the foot is also fully redeployed in the Qur’ān.⁷ Thus, for example, the Qur’ān invokes the foot in connection with contractual commitments in a way that hearkens to the “Hand-shake” scene of Wadi Alamasse and the ritual symbolisms of the sandal in that scene. This symbolism, as we have seen, is also found in the Biblical rituals of “sandal casting” (Psalms

⁷ Some of the symbolism of the foot in the Qur’ān is unclear. Such, for example, is the “leg” in verse 68:42 (on the Day when a leg shall be bared), which has been interpreted by Asad as the truth to be laid bare on the Day of Judgment. But most of the symbolism of the foot can be sensibly interpreted.

108:9), “stripping of the sandals” (Deut.: 25-9-9), and “touching of the thigh” (Gen. 24:2-3). Both the Assyrians and the Hebrews used these rituals to validate their claims, commitments, and oaths. None, however, is necessary anymore in the Qur’ān; simply “do not make oaths to deceive one another; or *foot will slip after having been firm*” (16:94). The image of the foot is prominent in this verse, but only as a metaphor to solidity. Gone is the need to resort to the foot or the sandal to signify legal and moral commitment; all that is left is the strength of good faith.

The ritualistic symbolism of the foot—in this case the sandal—is vividly indicated in one of the rare epiphanic moment in the Qur’ān. This is the moment when, at the fiery bush, Moses is ordered: “O Moses! Verily, I am your Lord! Take off, then, your sandals! Behold you are in the hollowed valley of *Tuwa*” (20:12-13). This ritual is the topic of meditation in the mystical book of *Khaṣ al-naʿlayn* (The Doffing of the Sandals) by the Andalusian Sufi, Ibn Qisiy (d. 560/1165), the founder of the *murīdūn*, an insurgent movement against the Almoravid in Algarve in southern Portugal. This book, which was studied by Ibn al-ʿArabi in his early age in Tunisia, was censured by Ibn Khaldun for its unorthodox ideas (Schimmel 1975, 264; Basaj 1995, 12-3).

A clear identification of the Most High with the foot in the sufi conception of spatiality is explicit in the following *ḥadīth qudsī* (Holy Tradition): “. . . I am the Hearing wherewith [My servant] heareth and the Sight wherewith he seeth and the hand wherewith he smiteth and the Foot whereon he walketh.” In his *Kitāb al-Ḥikam*, a book of sufi aphorisms, Tajuddin Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah (d. 1309), an early sufi of the Shadhiliyya, imagined that there was no space between God and a mystic which the foot could not cross, except those fields where the soul does battle with the egotistic tendencies (*Ḥikam* 244, and note 132). What this saying accomplishes, Schimmel (1975, 132 and 252) has indicated, is an effective interiorization of the concept of the mystical path (*tarīqa*) and the notion of spatiality that is implicit in the foot.⁸

The primordial connection between the foot and sexuality is also indirectly, but significantly, alluded to in the story of the creation of

⁸ A further sufi elaboration of the foot symbolism is found in a poem by Rumi, translated by Iqbal (1934, 86), we read that the sufi’s book is not composed of ink and letters, but is a sheet as white as snow. In this book, the scholar’s possessions are the pen-marks, but the Sufi’s attainments are the foot-prints; the Sufi is a hunter whose clue is the foot-prints of the deer, but whose aim is the deer’s musk-gland.

Adam and Eve and how “Satan caused them to slip, and drove them out of [Eden]” (2:36). A reference to the foot in this verse is more than preserved in the English cognate “to slip,” which means both to reveal unintentionally as well as to stumble with the foot. A slipper is also a casual shoe. The underlying sexual significance, however, is brought to light in 7:22, where Satan’s cunning and inducement cause Adam and Eve to discover what is in the standard interpretation their nakedness. This nakedness is highly sublimated in some mystical treatments. In one of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s poems, for example, the man’s and woman’s genitalia (*farağ*) are referred to as the primordial Tablet of knowledge and the primordial Pen. While the man’s genitalia traces the alphabets of knowledge; the woman’s genitalia traces the alphabets of the body (Basaj 1995, 21).

Thanks to the generous pliancy of the Arabic language, with a small phonemic shift, a lowly word such as *qdm*⁹ (“foot”) is transmuted through the semantic canopies of this language into *Muqaddam*, one of the ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names of Allah. Unlike most other Most Beautiful Names, *Muqaddam* originated in a *ḥadīth* (Prophetic saying), not in the Qur’ān, but it enjoys ample Scriptural warrant (7:34; 10:49; 16:61). Another small phonetic shift and *qidam* “eternity” is born. And what an awesome word! So significant is this kindred term of the foot that it forms the ontological core of the Divine transcendence in Islam. It is also at the root of that awful question, “the created or eternal nature of the Qur’ān,” which baffled the Muslim philosophers, tore asunder Islamic theological communities, engendered the first prosecution in the history of Islam, fueled dynastic movements (e.g., the Muwahhidun in North Africa and Spain) and established *Ash‘arism* as the mainstream theology of Islam (on the relevance of the “hand” and “foot” to the theological debates around anthropomorphism, see, e.g., *Al-Ibānah ‘an Uṣūl ad-Diyānah* by Abu ‘l-Hasan ‘Ali Ibn Isma‘il al-Ash‘ari (d. 324/935) [Translated by Walter C. Klein: New Haven Connecticut: American Oriental Society], at pp. 88-94).

That the foot symbolism is so prominent in the Qur’ān is, perhaps, simply a reminder of those essentially Islamic qualities: surrender, humility and fellowship. Indeed, to be humble means, both in English and

⁹ The word *qdm* is already used in many Semitic languages to designate the ordinal “first”, but not in Arabic where the word is *awwalu* (Old South Arabian *qdmn*, Ge‘ez and Tigre *qadami*, Aramaic *qadm(a)*, Syriac *qadma’* and *qadmaya’*) (Dombrowski and Dombrowski 199, 370).

in Arabic, having closeness to the soil. Humility is an act which is ritualized in Islam by the required kneeling down and the prostrations that are part of the daily prayers. Equally significant in this religion, which places a great emphasis on eschatology, is the symbolism of the hand and the foot in relation to the hereafter: Indeed, the measure of one's fulfillment of his or her cosmic mission is in what the hands have installed in advance (*mā qaddamat yadāhu*); for "We have warned you of suffering near at hand; a day when man will see what his *two hands* have sent forth" (78:40). To the true believers, the Qur'ān promises "glad tidings . . . and a precedence (*qadamu sidqin*) to the honor of their Lord." 10:2). Finally, the path in the self-described "religion of the straight path" is the *Shar'ā* (the law), the trail of foot prints.

Conclusion

A peek into the "anthropological structures of the imaginary," this essay explored the artistic and religious significance of the hand and foot and showed their ritual and cosmological elaboration in the scriptural, theological, and mystical traditions of Islam. In elucidating how the diffuse and contingent sacred of the pagans became a transsocial and transhistorical sacred focused on God, it creatively engaged the myths and metaphors which constitute the signs of the "wonder" or *le merveilleux* that supports the cosmology of the Qur'ān, but remains submerged under the logocentrist tendencies of the Islamic thinking

Regarding the elaboration of a new Islamic worldview, the epistemological import of this anthropological reading of the symbolisms of the hand and foot clearly favors the imaginative over the rational. The symbol of our *Homo sapiens* rise and the agent of our mobility and freedom, the foot is also, in the primal sense, the symbol of the force that binds (*'uqal*), and the power that limits (reason *'aql*), or even imprisons (*i'tql*). It is, in the Greek metaphor, humanity's Achillean vulnerability. The hand, by contrast, is a symbol of creativity, imagination and true freedom. More importantly, it is a symbol of grace, as one of the meanings of the Arabic cognate *yad* (hand) is "blessing" (*ni'ma*), and "kindness" (*ihsān*). The universality of this beatific symbolism of the hand is further attested in the French cognate *Mansuétude* (from the Latin roots *manus* and *suescere*—literally "to accustom to the hand")—a meaning which the French artist Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655) superbly captured in a painting known as *Douceur* or *Meekness*, showing a lamb standing on its hind legs and feeding from the hand of its mistress.

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