The relationship between Arabic *Allāh* and Syriac *Allāhā*[1]

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Abstract

Various etymologies have been proposed for Arabic *allāh* but also for Syriac *allāhā*. It has often been proposed that the Arabic word was borrowed from Syriac. This article takes a comprehensive look at the linguistic evidence at hand. Especially, it takes into consideration more recent epigraphical material which sheds light on the development of the Arabic language. Phonetic and morphological analysis of the data confirms the Arabic origin of the word *allāh*, whereas the problems of the Syriac form *allāhā* are described, namely that the Syriac form differs from that of other Aramaic dialects and begs explanation, discussing also the possibility that the Syriac word is a loan from Arabic. The final part considers qurʾanic *allāh* in its cultural and literary context and the role of the Syriac word in that context.

The article concludes, that both, a strictly linguistic, as well as cultural and literary analysis reveals a multilayered interrelation between the two terms in question. The linguistic analysis shows, that Arabic *allāh* must be a genuinely Arabic word, whereas in the case of Syriac *allāhā*, the possibility of both, a loan and a specific inner-Aramaic development are laid out. Apart from linguistic considerations, the historical and cultural situation in Northern Mesopotamia, i.e. the early Arab presence in that region is taken into scrutiny. In turn, a possible later effect of the prominent use of Syriac *allāhā* on the use in the Qurʾān is considered. It is emphasized, that we are presented with a situation of prolonged contact and exchange, rather than merely one-way borrowings.

I. Introductory remarks

Allāh is used in the *Qur'ān* as the designation of the one God, both as an appellative and a proper name. The word has been variously interpreted as a contraction of *al-'ilāh > allāh*[2] but also, due to the apparent similarity of the two words, as a loan from Syriac *allāhā*.[3] This article takes a fresh look at the origins of and relation between Arabic *allāh* and Syriac *allāhā*. Especially, it revisits the question of a possible loanword connection Syriac > Arabic and/or Arabic > Syriac. Typically, if a loanword relation was assumed, it has been presupposed that the direction was from Syriac into Arabic, since Syriac is attested earlier as a literary language.[4] A closer look at the linguistic situation, however, calls this assumption into question.

II. The linguistic evidence

A. Common Semitic

In Semitic, the oldest, most common word for 'god' has the following attestations: Akkadian *ilu(m)*, pl. *ilū*, Ugaritic *'l-*, pl. *'lm, 'lhm*, that is **/'ilu, 'ilūma, 'lVhūma/*, Hebrew *'ēl*, Phoenician, Aramaic, Arabic and Old

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[2]) Cf. Gerhard Böwering: "God and his Attributes", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, Vol. 2, Leiden/Boston, 2001, p. 316–331, who states that this is the majority view held today. Böwering, following Joshua Blau: "Arabic Lexicographical Miscellanies", in: *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Vol. 17, 1972, p. 173–190, p. 175 ff. posits 'Aramaic' (i. e. Syriac) *alāhā* as the source of Arabic *allāh*. I would posit either Aramaic *'elāhā* or Syriac *allāhā*, but cf. section II C for a full discussion, especially of Blau's theses, cf. Blau: "Miscellanies", p. 155 ff., on which Böwering's remarks seem to be based.

[3]) Cf. e. g. Arthur Jeffery: *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, Baroda, 1938, p. 66 with earlier literature. Karl Ahrens: "Christliches im Qoran", in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Vol. 84, 1930, p. 15–68, p. 35 assumes that Arabic *allāh* is 'strongly influenced' ("stark beeinflusst") by Syriac *alāhā* but allows for the possibility of an inner-Arabic development parallel to that of *Allāt < al-'Ilāt*.

[4]) Both Enno Littmann: "Nabatæan Inscriptions from Egypt–II", in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 16 (02), 1954, p. 211–246, and Susanne Krone: *Die altarabische Gottheit al-Lāt*, Frankfurt a. M. *et al.*, 1992, give arguments for a reverse direction of borrowing, namely Arabic > Syriac. These arguments are, among others, discussed in this article, i. e. the Syriac phonetic shape is difficult to explain. The Arabic form is natural in Arabic. Vicinity of speakers of Arabic and Syriac.

South Arabic *'l*.[5] This warrants a reconstructed form Proto-Semitic **'il-*. In Central-Semitic, we also find an extended form[6]: Hebrew *'elōah* (mostly in the pl. *'elōhīm*), Aramaic *'lh, 'elāh*, Arabic *'ilāh*, Old South Arabic *'lh*. In cuneiform writing, we find the forms *–(i)lu(ḫ)a, -ila(ḫ)ī* reflecting Canaanite and Aramaic phonetics respectively. Based on this, we can reconstruct Proto-Central-Semitic **'ilāh-*. Both Arabic and Syriac diverge from this picture in that they have *allāh* and *allāhā*; i.e. they differ in the vocalic *anlaut*[7] and the doubling of the second radical. While in Syriac *allāhā*[8] is the only form in use, Arabic has both *(al-)'ilāh* and *allāh*.[9] So let us take a closer look at both Arabic and Syriac.

B. Allāh: the situation in Arabic

Possibly the oldest attestation for *allāh* is found at *Qaryat al-Fāw* in the inscription of ʿIgl dating to the 1st century CE.[10] Given its importance we will cite the inscription here in full.

[5)] There is also Ηλ and Ιλος transmitted through Greek.

[6)] The origin of the second element *-āh* is not quite clear. It has been interpreted as a directional element cf. e.g. Hans BAUER: "Semitische Sprachprobleme", in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 69, 1915, p. 561–563, and as related to the plural forms Ugaritic *'lhm*, fem. *'lht*, although these might be rather read */'ilahūma, 'ilahātu/*, i.e. with a short second vowel, cf. Arab. *'ummu, 'ummahāt*, but cf. also J. HUEHNERGARD "Features of Central Semitic", in: A. GIANTO (ed.) Biblical and Oriental Essays in Memory of William L. Moran, Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005, p. 192. At any rate, since nouns with two radicals are rare in Semitic, the popularity of a 'fuller', triradical root is not surprising. For the relation between *'el* and *'elōhîm* in the Hebrew Bible, cf. already Theodor NÖLDEKE: "Elohim, El", in: *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, Berlin, 1982, p. 1175–1192.

[7)] Punic too, has *a: alonim, alonuth* but these are clearly different derivations of the root **il-*.

[8)] There is also *ēl* (West-Syriac *īl*, written *'Yl*) in Syriac but other than being a lexicographer's item, it is only used in proper names or as a calque of Hebrew *'el*. It may, however, reflect older usage, just as the element *-'il/-īl* found in both North and South Arabic names.

[9)] For the semantic difference between the Syriac and the Arabic, see further below under C.

[10)] Christian Julien ROBIN: "Les plus anciens monuments de la langue arabe" in: Ibid.: *L'Arabie antique de Karib 'il à Mahomet: nouvelles données sur l'histoire des Arabes grâce aux inscriptions*, (*Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, Vol. 61), Aix-en-Provence, 1991, p. 113–125, p. 115f.

1   ʿgl bn Hfʿm bn l-ʾḫ-h Rbbl bn H=
2   fʿm qbr w-l-hw w-l-wld-hw w-m=
3   rʾt-h w-wld-hw w-wld wld-hm
4   w-ns¹y-hm ḥryr ḏw-ʾl Glwn f-
5   ḏ-h b-Khl w-Lh w-ʿtr
6   S²rq mn ʿzzᵐ w-wnym w-
7   s²ryᵐ w-mrthnᵐ ʾbdᵐ
8   bn wks¹ ᵐ ʿd-ky tmṯ=
9   r ʾ-s¹my dm w-l-ʾr=
10 ḏ s² ʿr

1   ʿIgl fils de Hōfiʿamm a construit pour son frère Rabī<ʿ>īl fils de Hō-
2   fiʿamm <ce> tombeau, ainsi que pour lui, pour ses enfants, pour son é-
3   pouse, pour ses enfants (à elle), pour leurs petits enfants
4   et pour leurs femmes, nobles du lignage de Ghalwān. Puis
5   il l'a confié à Kahl, à <Al>lāh, à ʿAththar
6   a<sh>-Shāriq contre n'importe qui de puissant et de faible,
7   acheteur et preneur de gages, pour toujours,
8   contre tout dommage, tant que donnera
9   le ciel de la pluie et que la ter-
10 re sera couverte d'herbe[11]

This text makes use of the definite article ʾl-, showing the same behaviour as known from Classical Arabic, i. e. assimilation before 'solar' consonants, cf. ʾ-s²rq and ʾ-s¹my for /aš-šāriq/ and /as-samāʾ/.[12] As is to be expected, doubling of consonants is not indicated. Furthermore, the first *alif* of the definite article is *hamzat al-waṣl*, that is, it is dropped when preceded by another vowel, cf. w-l-ʾrḍ = /wa-l-ʾarḍ/. Hence w-Lh in line 5 could be read as /wa-Llāh/ rather than /wa-Lāh/. This seems to be confirmed by another inscription from *Qaryat al-Fāw*[13]:

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[11]) English translation: "ʿIgl, son of Hōfiʿamm, has built <this> grave for his brother Rabīb<ʾ>ī, son of Hōfiʿamm, as well as for himself, his children, his wife, her children, their grand-children and their wives, nobles of the line of Ġalwān. After that, he has entrustet it to Kahl, <Al>lāh, ʿAṭṭar a<š>-Šāriq against anyone, powerful or weak, buyer or mortgage taker (?), forever, against any harm, as long as the sky give rain and the world be covered with grass."

[12]) Or perhaps rather /aś-śāriq/ and /as-samay/.

[13]) Jan Ryckmans: "Alphabets, Scripts and Languages in Pre-Islamic Arabian Epigraphical Evidence", in: Abd Al Rahman T. al-Ansary et alii (Ed.): *Pre-Islamic Arabia (Studies in the History of Arabia, II, Riyadh)*, Riyadh, 1984, p. 73–86, p. 75.

1	… … *]ft ’q=*	[… … *]ft* a dé-
2	[*ny mr]’-hw ’lh f-s¹m=*	[dié à son seign]eur *Allāh*, et Il les a
3	[*ᶜ l-hm]w*	exaucé]s

Here we find the form *’lh* /*allāh*/ with the onset intact. Theoretically, one could read *lāh* in the first inscription and *’ilāh* in the second. However, since the inscriptions are likely to be in the same variety of Arabic, applying Ogham's Razor, it is preferable to assume a form *(a)llāh* in both cases. This Early North Arabic inscription displays, next to a few others, e. g. in *Namāra* and *Ḥarrān*, the use of the definite article *al-*.[14] What is more, the article behaves, as noted above, as in Classical Arabic. There is a good deal of evidence for both *allāh* and *al-’ilāh*, both epigraphical and other. In addition to the above mentioned inscriptions there are also transcriptions of Arabic names found in bilingual Arabic-Greek texts, which confirm the existence of the form *allāh* even in Safaitic,[15] cf. an inscription from the Jordanian desert (WH 1894) where *WHB’LH* is transcribed into Greek as OYABAΛΛAC, suggesting an underlying Arabic form /*wahballāh*/. The same evidence is found in Nabatean.[16] In Palmyra we find two proper names *ZBDLH* and *NBWLH* that might be interpreted as something like /*zabdallāh*/ and /*nabūllāh*/ 'Zabd is the God' and 'Nabû is the God'.[17] At the same time we find *al-’ilāh* e. g. in Zabad (60 km south-east of Aleppo) in an inscription dated to ca. 512 CE[18]:

[*d̲](k)r ’l-’lh Srgw bn ’mt Mnfw w-Ṭlḥ bn Mr’ l-Qys w-Srgw bn S‘dw w-Strw w-Sy[.]tḥw.*
Que Dieu se [souvi]enne de Serge fils d'*Amat Manāf*, de Ṭlḥ (?) fils d'Imru' al-Qays, de Serge fils de Sa‘d, de *Strw* et de *Sy[.]tḥw (?)*[19]

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[14] Rainer Maria Voigt: "Der Artikel im Semitischen", in: *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Vol. 43, 1998, p. 221–258, p. 225.

[15] The issue of the early North Arabic definite article is a complicated one. For the present study it is sufficient to note, that the article *al-* is attested in the respective areas, at least in personal names. For more on the question see Alfred F. L. Beeston: "Languages of pre-islamic Arabia", in: *Arabica*, Vol. 28, p. 178–186; Voigt: "Der Artikel im Semitischen" and Christian Julien Robin: "Les inscriptions de l'arabie antique et les études arabes", in: *Arabica*, Vol. 48, p. 509–577, p. 541 f.

[16] Written *WHB’LHY*, cf. also Littmann: "Nabatæan Inscriptions", p. 222f.

[17] Cf. Krone: "*al-Lāt*", p. 463.

[18] After Christian Julien Robin: "La réforme de l'écriture arabe à l'époque du califat médinois", in: *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, Vol. 59, p. 319–364, p. 337.

[19] The translations given are by Robin: "La réforme", p. 337.

This latter inscription illustrates the use of *al-ʾilāh* in a Christian context. This means that use of the definite article with the generic term for god was seen as suitable to denote the Christian God. Indeed, the use of *al-ʾilāh* next to *allāh* in a monotheistic context is also attested e. g. in a poem by *an-Nābiġa aḏ-Ḏubyānī*:[20]

> *Lahum šīmatun lam yuʿṭihā llāhu ġayrahum // mina l-ǧūdi, wa-l-ʾaḥlāmi ġayri ʿawāzibī*
>
> *maǧallatuhum ḏātu l-ʾilāhi, wa-dīnuhum // qawīmun fa-mā yarǧūna ġayra l-ʿawāqibī.*

> "They have a virtue that God [*allāh*] has given to no one but them, // [a virtue] of bounteousness, and unyielding prudence.
> Their scripture is that of God [*al-ʾilāh*], and their religion is one of rectitude, they only want (anticipate) the consequences [of their acts]".[21]

As mentioned before, it has been suggested very early on to derive *allāh* from a contraction of *al-ʾilāh*. Barring the assumption of a loan from a different language, such a contraction would seem to be the only way to explain the form in question. Infact this kind of contraction seems to be regular at least in some parts of Arabia. Already Brockelmann (BROCKELMANN: *Vergleichende Grammatik*, §54e) states:

> Die Aufeinanderfolge gleicher und ähnlicher Laute wird im Arab. sogar dann noch als störend empfunden, wenn ein fest eingesetzter Vokal zwischen ihnen steht *al-ʾilāhu > allāhu* 'Gott', *al-ʾilātu* (Herodots Αλιλατ) > *allātu* 'die Göttin', *al-ʾulāʾi > allāʾi* 'welche', **al-ʾunāsu > annāsu* 'die Menschen'.

It was David TESTEN[22] who noted, that *al- + ʾu/iCāC > al-CāC*[23] is a regular "Hijazi" development, not shared by all dialects.[24] We would second the analysis of *allāh* as being made up of the definite article *al + ʾilāh* since

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[20]) An-NĀBIĠA aḏ-Ḏubyānī: *Dīwān an-Nābiġa aḏ-Ḏubiyānī*, Egypt, 1911, p. 15; cf. also Toshihiko IZUTSU: *God and man in the Koran* [Reprint der Ausgabe Tokyo, 1964], New York 1980, p. 116.

[21]) Translation by Ghasan El-Masri.

[22]) David TESTEN: "Literary Arabic and Early Hijazi: Contrasts in the Marking of Definiteness", in: Elabbas Benmamoun, Mushira Eid, Niloofar Haeri (Eds.), *Perspectives on Arabic Linguistics*, Vol. XI, Atlanta, 2005, p. 209–225.

[23]) In this, schematic notation *C* stands as a place-holder for any consonant. The *anlaut* of the respective word can have either *i* or *u* but not *a*.

[24]) It seems likely, however, that this development is not exclusive to "Hijazi" but was actually characteristic of a more widespread 'western' dialect continuum.

1) the *anlaut* behaves like the definite article in Classical Arabic.
2) *al* + *ʾu/iCāC* > *al-CāC* is a regular phonetical development in at least some dialects of Arabic.
3) the doubling of *l* cannot otherwise be explained in Arabic.
4) there is a parallel case with *al-ʾilāt* > *allāt*[25].
5) *allāh* is used parallel to *al-ʾilāh*[26].
6) *allāh* means 'one particular god/*the* God'[27].

So what was understood in Arabia by the use of *allāh*? Firstly, the word seems to be employed to denote a specific god as in the *Qaryat al-Fāw* inscription, invoked next to other gods. Also, it would appear that it can be understood as 'the specific god in context', i.e. the one whom I worship or who is related to a certain sanctuary or the like, as perhaps proper names like *Nabûllāh* 'Nabû is the god' suggest. Even *Wahballāh* may be interpreted that way. I.e. *allāh* could not only be taken to refer to a god named *allāh* but also as meaning 'gift of the god', scil., 'of the god whom I worship'. In this case *allāh* would function as a generic term. This interpretation would also account for the high number of personal names that contain the element *allāh* against the scarcity of the word occuring in isolation.[28]

That means that in actual inscriptions, the name of the god invoked is mentioned, whereas in names a particular god is only implied but simply designated as 'the god'. A parallel can be found in Old South Arabic where the word *ʾlh-n* /*ʾilāhān*/ that is *ʾilāh* + the OSA definite article *-ān* is employed to denote the god venerated at a specific temple, when and where it is used *en lieu* of the proper name of the god to whom the temple is dedicated. It is also found in monotheistic contexts.[29] Lastly there is evidence,

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[25] *ʾilāt* is, of course, not just the feminine form of *ʾilāh*, but rather an old formation, to be compared with Ugaritic *ilt* /*ʾilāt*/ (DEL OLMO LETE & SANMARTÍN 2003:66) and Phoenician *ʾlt* /*ʾilōt*/ (KRAHMALKOV 2000:56f.).

[26] For point 5 and 6 see below.

[27] Although not necessarily exclusively so, see the following.

[28] HEALEY (2001:92) mentions an inscription from Ruwāfah, which is, according to the author, probably post-Nabataean, where the dedication is to *ʾlhʾlh…ʾlhʾ*, 'the god of...' In *ʾlhʾ* we might have an 'aramaicized' form of Arabic *allāh*. In that case, *Allāh* would have been used as the proper name of a god. The use of *allāh* as at times denoting either, in a generic way, 'the specific god in question' and at times *Allāh* as the personal name of a god (and then later of the only God) would be similar to the etymon *ʾil-* in North-West Semitic, where it can mean both 'god' in a generic sense and the god *Il*.

[29] Cf. also Christian Julien ROBIN: "Les hautes-terres du Nord-Yémen avent l'Islam, I. Recherches sur la géographie tribale et religieuse de Ḥawlān Quḍāʿa et du

from the *Qurʾān*, that *allāh* has been understood as a 'High God' even before the adoption of Islam. This is suggested by passages like:

> Q 43:87: "If thou ask them, who created them, they will certainly say, 'God' (*allāh*)."
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> Q 10:31: "Say: 'Who is it that sustains you (in life) from the sky and from the earth? or who is it that has power over hearing and sight? And who is it that brings out the living from the dead and the dead from the living? and who is it that rules and regulates all affairs?' They will soon say, 'God'(*allāh*). Say, "will ye not then show piety (to Him)?"
>
> Q 39:38: "If indeed thou ask them who it is that created the heavens and the earth, they would be sure to say, 'God' (*allāh*)."

These verses seem to address 'polytheists' rather than Christians or Jews. Hence they would seem to suggest belief in a supreme creator God among 'pagan' Arabs.[30] In brief, we find the use of *allāh* denoting either 'the god' in a specific context or an individual god who might have been viewed as a 'high god' before Islam. The term is also used by Christians to denote their God.[31]

C. Allāhā: the situation in Syriac

In Syriac *allāhā* the generic name for 'god', most notably, but not exclusively, is used for the Jewish and Christian God. Thus, in a pagan context, we find e.g. *allāhā sānē bnayyā* 'the God who hates (his) children', for *Saturnus* (*Kronos*). We find it also in following contexts: in the absolute state *hayklā d-metqrē d-kul allāh* 'the temple which is called 'of every god', i.e. the *Pantheon*; in the plural *yawmātā d-allāhē* 'the days of the gods', i.e. the seven days of the week; in a Jewish and Christian context e.g. *allāhā*

Pays de Hamdān; II." in: *Nouvelles inscriptions*, Vol. 1, 1982, p. 184, p. 58, and Ibid.: "Le judaïsme de Himyar", in: *Arabia*, Vol. 1, 2003, p. 97–172.

[30]) Cf. Peterson (2004). On the question, compare also Krone: *"al-Lāt"*, p. 467 ff. and William Montgomery Watt: "Belief in a 'High God' in pre-islamic Mecca", in: *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Vol. 16 (1), 1971, p. 35–40, and Ibid.: "The Qurʾān and Belief in a 'High God'", in: *Der Islam*, Vol. 56, 1979, p. 205–211; see also Izutsu: "God and man", p. 96–119. If adressed to Christians, the passage would at least attest the 'monotheistic use' of *allāh*.

[31]) For the presence of Christians in Arabia and adjacent territories cf. e.g. John Spencer Trimingham (1979) and Theresia Hainthaler: *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam: Verbreitung und konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit; eine Hinführung*, Leuven *et al.*, 2007.

d-ʿālmē 'eternal God', rendering Hebrew *ʾel ʿōlām*; distinctly Christian in *allāhā rabbā yešūʿ mšīḥā* 'the great God Jesus the Messiah';[32] and, last but not least, in *bšem abā wa-brā w-rūḥā qaddīšā, ḥad allāhā šarrīrā* 'in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One true God'.

The exact shape of the Syriac word has been debated. One finds both transcriptions as *allāhā* and *alāhā*. While we find references to doubling in standard grammars, e.g. Nöldecke (NÖLDECKE: *Kurzgefasste Syr. Grammatik* S. 14/§21) and Brockelmann (BROCKELMANN: *Syrische Grammatik*, §135), it was BLAU who argued strongly for reading *alāhā*.[33] This form is, however, morphonetically impossible in Syriac. A proto-form **alāh-* must become > *elāh(ā)* in Syriac, according to the well-known rule of vowel-reduction: a pretonic *a* is reduced, and the remaining aleph is then vocalised to *e*, as can be seen in verbs with initial aleph, e.g. **ʾamara > ʾ(ə)mar > emar*, analogous to **qatala > qətal*. BLAU claims that the initial *a-* of *al(l)āhā* was preserved due to a preceding ʾ. In Syriac however, ʾ (aleph) seems never to be retained at the beginning of a word, no matter what the quality of the *anlauting* vowel, as can be easily gathered from Syriac phonotactics.[34] BLAU refers to Nöldeke[35] for examples of retention of *a* (not ʾ, one may add!) as in e.g. *akōl/akūl* (the imperative of *ekal* 'to eat') or *amīr* (passive participle of *emar* 'to say'). Yet, the anlauting *a-* here is not due to a retained ʾ but rather to paradigmatic leveling. At any rate, to my knowledge, all instances of **aCá́-* show > *eCá́-*, cf. e.g. **anā (*older **anʾa) > enā* ('I'), that is the regular development as expected. The Syriac evidence, as noted by Brockelmann (BROCKELMANN: *Syrische Grammatik*, §135) and others, clearly points to *ll*. In West-Syriac, *allāhā* is only secondarily pronounced *alāhā /alōhō/*, as all doubled consonants are simplified in that dialect. This, however, does not affect the establishment of the original form and is a later development, not specific to the word in question.

BLAU's statement seems to be based on Bar Hebraeus[36] who notes that the East Syrians (*madnḥāyē*) do not double the *l* in *al(l)āhā*. It is, however, not clear, whether this reflects the original state of affairs. It could also be

[32] The Syriac examples are taken from Richard PAYNE SMITH: *Thesaurus Syriacus*, Vol. 1, Hildesheim *et al.*, 1981, p. 195 f.

[33] Cf. BLAU: "Miscellanies", p. 155 ff.

[34] For example the uniconsonantal preposition *b-*, *l-* form one syllable with a vowel, in /*ballāhā/ballahāy*, /*lallāhā*/not /*b-ʾallāhā*, /*l-ʾallāhā*. The original ʾ is never "stable".

[35] Theodor NÖLDEKE: *Kurz gefasste syrische Grammatik*, Leipzig, 1908, p. 24 §34.

[36] MOBERG (1922:227)

secondary since laryngeals, pharyngeals and also *r* lose, as noted by Bar Hebraeus (*ibidem*), their doubling even in East Syriac.[37] The latter is clearly a secondary development. Note that in a different area of phonetics *l* behaves similarly to the above mentioned consonants in that an original **e > a* before *l*.[38] Indeed, Brockelmann explains the Syriac form by this process: **ilāhā > 'ellāhā > (')allāhā*. In order to do that, he still has to posit a doubled *l* since the soundchange **el > al* only occurs in closed syllables. That means that the change of initial *e > a* would be even less explainable within Syriac, if we would posit +*alāhā* since we are dealing with an original *'e- < 'i* not *a-* as in *amīr* etc. Note also, that Bar Hebraeus mentions the pronunciation of the *l* in West-Syriac *allāhā* as *mufaḥḥama*.[39] He goes on to note, that some speakers of West-Syriac use the same pronunciation with secondarily doubled *l* (*'pīpā*). This pronounciation, at least in the divine name, could, of course, be due to Arabic influence rather than to the preservation of something old. It is, however, remarkable, that this pronunciation was conferred to cases of (secondarily) doubled *l* in West-Syriac. While it's not possible to infer the original pronunciation of *allāhā* in West-Syriac from Bar Hebraeus' statement, *allāhā* must have been 'felt' to contain a double *l* be it due to Arabic influence or not. Last but not least, it should be noted that there seems to be a tradition that has a Jewish Babylonian vocalisation of the divine name as *'alāhā*.[40] The vocalisation is, however, fraught with difficulties. Note, that the more common form is *'ylh* /*elāhā*/ and that the former is typically found in the mouth of non-Jews. Hence, apart from the difficulties in vocalisation, it is doubtful whether *ălāhā* represents a genuine phonetic development in a dialect independent of Syriac or rather a form used by non-Jewish Syriac or Arabic speakers.

Thus, for the purpose of this study, I'll posit an original form *allāhā*. Note, however, that many of the major points made in what follows are valid also if one posits *alāhā*. So, to sum up, Syriac *allāhā* is phonetically problematic.

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[37]) Bar Hebraeus uses the term *ḥwīṣā* for 'doubling' which corresponds to Arabic *mušaddad*. Cf. also Moberg (1907–1913:38).

[38]) As minor details, I would posit **elāhā* (with *e*) as Aramaic proto-form and leave out the glottal stop (') in the Syriac since it isn't pronounced.

[39]) He uses the word *ṭliḥtā* which was misunderstood by Payne-Smith (1981), but is probably correctly understood by Moberg (1907–1913:45). Cf. also Sokoloff (2009:532). Phonetically, *tafḫīm* in Arabic is either velarisation or pharyngealisation.

[40]) Cf. Sokoloff 2002:133

All other Aramaic dialects have continuations of Proto-Central-Semitic **'ilāh*, namely *elāh(ā)*. That means that the Syriac form differs in two crucial points: 1) the *anlaut* has *a-* rather than *e-*, and 2) the second radical is doubled, i.e. *ll* vs. *l*. One might account for the second phenomenon by referring to the doubling or gemination of a consonant after short vowel found in some Syriac words, e.g. *leššānā < *lišān-*, *attānā < *'atānā* 'she-ass' etc.[41] This, however, still does not account for the *anlaut a-*. A development *eCC- > aCC* other than due to analogy is, to my knowledge, unattested in Classical Syriac. For now, this leaves us essentially with three possibilities: Syriac *allāhā* (<common Aramaic *'elāh(ā)*) may be due to either:

1)	some sort of analogy,
2)	morphological adjustment or
3)	borrowing.

As for 1), the problem with analogy due to semantic attraction is, that there seem to be no candidates that would be semantically close enough to trigger such a development.[42] With regard to 2), there is a possibility that because the form *pə'āl(ā)* (< **pa'āl*) in Syriac is overwhelmingly associated with abstract or action nouns, *allāhā* owes its form to alignment with the agent noun pattern *pa''āl(ā)*. Note the Aramaic *elāh-* is from < **pi'āl*, not **pa'āl*, but the two patterns coalesced in Syriac into > *p(ə)'āl* so that, synchronically, there would have been no difference for speakers of Syriac. This alignment could have happened after a 'strengthening' of the second radical **elāh > *ellāh* or without this intermediate step. An intermediate step would, however, probably have facilitated the passage from Pattern *pə'āl > pa''āl*. As for 3), one could assume a loan from Arabic, namely *allāh*, which, unlike the Syriac, is morphonetically motivated or derivable.[43]

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[41] Cf. Carl Brockelmann: *Syrische Grammatik: mit Paradigmen, Literatur, Chrestomathie und Glossar*, Berlin, 1991, p. 18.

[42] Semantic attraction refers to the fact that words which are either antonyms, near synonyms or are otherwise semantically grouped together, often show secondary morphological alignment.

[43] The problematic form of the Syriac word was already noted by W. Fischer and the possibility of a loan from some Arabic dialect into Syriac is discussed in Krone: *al-Lāt*, p. 464 ff.

III. Discussion

In what follows I will further discuss the possibility of Syriac *allāhā* being a loanword from Arabic, the possible influence of Syriac on the Arabic word and the state of affairs as present in the *Qurʾān*. Speakers of Arabic dialects using the definite article *al-* and showing the form *allāh* rather than *al-ʾilāh* settled in the vicinity of Syriac language centres. Indeed, it is the official language of Edessa, the capital of the realm of Osrhoene[44] which was founded by an Arabic dynasty in 132 BCE, at least some of whose members bore Arabic names: Abgar(?), Wāʾil (wʾl), Maʿnū.[45] There are also a number of words in Syriac which might be early loans from Arabic, such as *wālē* 'it is fit, behoves, one should' (< Arabic *WLY*?) and *waʿdā* 'appointment' (the latter being also attested in other Aramaic dialects). Arabic loans are also found in other Aramaic dialects, most notably Nabatean. Most importantly, perhaps, there are a number of divine names of Arabic origin attested in Edessa, as well as in other cities of Greater Syria, like Hatra and Palmyra. Thus, *ʿAzīzū* (*ʿzyzw*, Greek *Azizos*) and *Munʿim* (*Mnʿ(y)m*, Greek *Monimos*) are well attested in Edessa.[46] Of special importance are PN like *ʿbdlt* /*ʿabdallāt*/ and *whblt* /*wahballāt*/ in Old Syriac and Palmyrene inscriptions respectively.[47] It seems to reflect the Arabic theonym *allāt*. This then would indicate not only the presence of Arabic theonyms but moreover, one that is probably formed in analogy to *allāh*, namely *allāt* < *al-ʾilāt*, cf. BROCKELMANN's statement cited before.[48] All taken together there is a visible Arabic element in the Osrhoene. Note also, that most early Christian texts attested in Arabic use *al-ʾilāh* but *allāh* is also found.[49] Given its use in a pagan con-

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[44]) Cf. Jan RETSÖ: *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their history from the Assyrians to the Umayyads*, New York, 2003, p. 440 ff.

[45]) Cf. Klaus BEYER: *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer: samt den Inschriften aus Palästina, dem Testament Levis aus der Kairoer Genisa, der Fastenrolle und den alten talmudischen Zitaten : aramaistische Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung, Deutung, Grammatik/Wörterbuch*, Göttingen, 1984, p. 46 und Ernst Axel KNAUF: "Arabo-Aramaic and ʿArabiyya: From Ancient Arabic to Early Standard Arabic 200 CE–600 CE", in: Angelika Neuwirth/Nicolai Sinai/Michael Marx (Eds.), *The Qurʾān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic* Milieu, Leiden, 2010, p. 197–254, p. 212 fig. 8.

[46]) Cf. Hendrik J. W. DRIJVERS: *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, Leiden, 1982.

[47]) See for example DRIJVERS & HEALEY 1998:58 and HEALEY 2009:158 ff. The latter, i.e. /*wahballāt*/, corresponds to Greek *Athenodoros* 'gift of Athena'.

[48]) Cf. however HEALEY 2001:112 f. for different derivations of the name *Allāt*.

[49]) That these forms were felt to be interchangeable is also demonstrated by the two versions of the inscription of Hind bint al-Ḥāriṯ, transmitted by al-Bakrī and

text, it could be argued that if *allāhā* was a loan from Arabic, *allāh* must have been 'tuned down' to a less 'definite' meaning than 'the particular god' etc., so that in Syriac it could be used just as a generic term for god, without any 'definiteness' attached to it *per se*.[50] On the other hand, incorporation of a word with a definite article is nothing unusual. One example from Arabic is *timsāḥ*, pl. *tamāsīḥ* 'crocodile' < Copt. *ti-* (def. article) + *msah*[51]. Conversely, there are examples of loans from Arabic into other languages like Coptic /attalak/ < *aṭ-ṭalāq* ('divorce') or Spanish e. g. *alcalde* < *al-qāḍī* ('mayor', < 'judge'), neither of which bears any 'definite' quality.[52]

Regardless of whether the Arabic word was or was not the source of Syriac *allāhā*, Arabic *allāh* can be plausibly explained as being not a loan word but the result of inner-Arabic developments, namely resulting from *al* + *'ilāh*. As mentioned above, the development *al+'i/uCāC > al-CāC* is well documented. The word also behaves just as we would expect, as the *anlaut* is treated as an *alif al-waṣl*. One could, of course, suppose that if *allāh* was a loan from Syriac, it would have been secondarily adjusted, that is, reinterpreted as containing the definite article. Such developments are known from Arabic, cf. e. g. the reinterpretation of *Alexandria* as *al-Iskandariyya*. However, the very early use of *allāh* as meaning 'the god/God' and the parallel use of *'ilāh* + definite article in Old South Arabic seem to counter this scenario.[53] Also, the parallel scenario of *al-'ilāt > allāt*, earlier attested also as *han-'ilāt*[54] speaks strongly in favour of an inner-Arabic genesis.

Yāqūt, cf. Christian Julien Robin: "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar, des "Romains" et des Perses", in: *Semitica et Classica*, Vol. 1, 2008, p. 167–202, p. 185 f., where al-Bakrī uses *al-'ilāh* twice, whereas Yāqūt has first *al-'ilāh* and then *allāh* with no difference in meaning.

[50]) In monotheistic use the word does, of course, acquire that definiteness by virtue of the creed associated with it. It's not 'a god' or 'this specific god' but 'the one and only God'. However, if Arabic *allāh* was loaned into Syriac, this would have happened before the advent of Christianity because *allāh* is already attested in pagan Syriac inscriptions, cf. e. g. Hendrik J. W. Drijvers: *Old Syriac (Edessean) Inscriptions*, Leiden, 1972, p. 2.

[51]) Cf. Carsten Peust: *Egyptian phonology: an introduction to the phonology of a dead language*, Göttingen, 1999, p. 70; Werner Vycichl: *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte*, Leuven 1983, p. 123.

[52]) Thus e. g. in Spanish there can be *un alcalde* 'a mayor' or *el alcalde* 'the mayor'.

[53]Cf. Peter Stein „Himyar und der Eine Gott: Südarabien in den letzten zwei Jahrhunderten vor dem Islam", in: *Orientalia*, Vol. 79 (4), 2010, pp. 558–566, p. 558.

[54]) Cf. Knauf: "Arabo-Aramaic", p. 227.

At the same time, Syriac-speaking Christians were present from *al-Ḥīra* to *Naǧrān* at least from the 6[55] century CE onwards[55], that is, Christians whose literary language, if not that of daily speech, would have been at least partly Syriac. Therefore, the use of Syriac *allāhā* for the Christian God would have been familiar to some Arabs. It could thus, although not as a formal loanword, still have semantically influenced the use of Arabic *allāh*. This is borne out by a brief look at the *Qurʾān*. There, we find essentially three more or less appellative denominations of 'God': *rabb*, *raḥmān* and *allāh*. *Rabb* is of very early attestation, it is found in South Arabic inscription referring to gods. *Raḥmān* is well known as a designation of the monotheistic God in South Arabia. It is also common in Jewish post-biblical literature. In the course of the *Qurʾān* both *raḥmān* and *allāh* are accepted as names for God (Q 17:110) although *raḥmān* is later relegated to the role of epithet[56]. *Allāh*, who was probably already a prominent god in Mecca[57] becomes 'the God' in the monotheistic sense of Islam. Since God is one of a kind, *allāh* is both a *nomen genericum* and a *nomen proprium*.

IV. Conclusion

Three points emerge from the above: 1) With the evidence at hand it remains unclear whether Syriac *allāhā*, a curious form within the framework of Syriac, is due to inner-Syriac development or due to borrowing from an Arabic source. 2) There is no reason to assume a loan from Syriac into Arabic, as *allāh* is perfectly motivated, i.e. phonetically regular, in (some dialects of) Arabic and its development within Arabic is safely accounted for. 3) The use of *allāh* (next to *ar-raḥmān*) as personal/generic name for the One God in the *Qurʾān* can be explained by its use in Arabic proper. There is, however, a good possibility that the prominence of Syriac *allāhā* and its near homophony positively influenced the use of *allāh* in the *Qurʾān*. That is to say, we find *allāh* in the *Qurʾān* not only because it was the most 'fitting' word to be used,[58] in spite of or because of *allāh*'s promi-

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[55] Cf. HAINTHALER: *Christliche Araber*, p. 143 ff.

[56] See BÖWERING: "God and his Attributes".

[57] Cf. Montgomery WATT: "Belief" and also John F. HEALEY: *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, Leiden, 2001, p. 83–85.

[58] Eschewing *raḥmān* as sole designation. Although the latter is found prominently in rabbinic writings and was used in (South) Arabia as the near exclusive designation of the monotheistic God and, apparently, also by contemporary prophets, most notably *Musaylima*, it was given less prominence than *allāh*, possibly due to an

nent position within pre-islamic religion, but perhaps because pre-islamic connotations were more easily superseded taking into consideration that its near homophone Syr. *allāhā* was already prominently used in a monotheistic context.

To sum up, Arabic *allāh* denoted a specific god, in the sense of 'the god in question' or an individual god who, at least at some point, had assumed the role of a 'high god'. The word was therefore, on the one hand, suited to be taken over into Syriac as a generic term for 'god', especially so, because in the receiving language the Arabic definite article did not necessarily manifest its determining character. On the other hand, in Arabic and on the Arabic peninsula, it was understood as 'the god', and thus lent itself to the designation of the monotheistic God, as, next to Judaism and Christianities, 'pagan' henotheistic or even monotheistic tendencies were already present.[59] This latter use of the word could well have been enforced by the near homophone Syr. *allāhā*,[60] which had become the standard word to refer to the Christian and Jewish God in Syriac and would, given the presence of Christians whose literary language was Syriac, have had at least some currency in Arabia.

We find, then, that both, inter- and intralingual specifics have to be considered. A strict look at phonetics and morphology yields results with respect to the question of immediate 'physical' borrowing. Of course these findings should, if possible, be accompanied by a historically plausible scenario taking into proper consideration both 'physical' and 'intellectual'

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effort to draw a line between Islam and other monotheistic movements in Arabia, cf. KISTER (2003). Note that next to its use in monotheistic contexts, *raḥmān* is widely attested in non-Jewish and non-Christian contexts, cf. e. g. HEALEY: *Nabataeans*, p. 190, and especially Ibid.: "The Kind And Merciful God: On Some Semitic Divine Epithets", in: Manfred DIETRICH/Ingo KOTTSIEPER (eds.), *Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf. Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient: Festschrift für Oswald Loretz zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres mit Beiträgen von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen*, Münster, 1998, p. 349–356, p. 355f. KISTER (1980), BROCKELMANN (1922), GIBB (1962). Cf. also KISTER (1980), especially pp. 36 and 48. See also J. C. GREENFIELD "From ᾽LHRḤMN to AL-RAḤMĀN: The source of a Divine Epithat", in B. H. Hary, J. L. Hayes & F. Astren (eds.) *Judaism and Islam: Boundaires, Communication and Interaction – Essays in Honor of William u. Brinner*, 2000, Brill: Leiden.

[59]) For a more general picture cf. Polymnia ATHANASSIADI/Michael FREDE: *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity.* Oxford, 1999, and HEALEY: *Nabataeans*, p. 189ff.

[60]) Arne A. AMBROS: "Zur Entstehung der Emphase in Allah", in: *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, Vol. 73, p. 23–32, notes that the velarised pronunciation of *ll* in Arabic *allāh* may be due to Syriac influence.

circumstances. As the above indicates, we do not deal with simple 'who from whom'-scenarios but intricate interrelationships between languages and groups engaged in a process of simultaneous giving and taking, rather than just one or the other.

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