

Qad kunna lā na°budu °llāha wa-lā na°rifuhu.
ON THE PROBLEM OF THE PRE-ISLAMIC
LORD OF THE KA°BA

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This article deals with the problem of the pre-Islamic Lord of the Ka°ba. An attempt is made to critically review the accepted theory that Allah had been the main deity of this shrine long before Islam was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad. The evidence of scripture and our other sources suggests that the heathen Arabs may have been not particularly familiar with the notion of Allah as the greatest deity reigning over a swarm of lesser idols. Deities other than Allah were apparently greatly revered in the Ka°ba, and their role as lords of the sanctuary cannot be easily discarded. As for the concept of Allah as the main deity in the Ka°ba, the evidence seems to stem from the early Islamic period, when the monotheistic notion of God prevailed and brought with it a new understanding of history as a sequence of monotheistic prophecies beginning with the very creation of the world. This concept appears to be mainly responsible for the emergence of the belief that Allah was present in people's faith from the days of Adam until the final reincarnation of His religion in Muḥammad's *da°wa*.

I. The Koran includes two remarkable verses, which refer to the deity of the Ka°ba before Islam. Neither mentions the sanctuary's god by name. In Koran 27:91 he is named "the Lord of this territory": *I have only been commanded to serve the Lord of this territory, which has He made sacred; to Him belongs everything. And I have been commanded to be of those that surrender.*¹ In Koran 106:3 he is referred to as the "Lord of this House (or abode)": *So let them serve the Lord of this House who has fed them against hunger. And secured them from fear.*² In both cases there arises the question to what extent Allah might be assumed to have been the Lord of the Ka°ba before Muḥammad.

II. We possess a profuse body of accounts which trace the history of the Ka°ba back to the time of Creation or even prior to it. This chronological

¹ Trans. A. J. Arberry. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor J. N. Bell for his assistance with the last drafts of this article.

² Trans. A. J. Arberry.