

The Attitude of Islam Towards Painting

by

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Azraqī (— c. 850 A. D.) wrote that when the Prophet entered the Kaaba after he had conquered Mekka, he said to Shaybah ibn 'Othmān : "O Shaybah ! Destroy every picture in the place except what is underneath my hands". Azraqī continued that, when the Prophet removed his hands, there were underneath the pictures of Jesus, son of Mary and his mother¹.

Some orientalists have taken the above passage as a proof that painting was not forbidden or disapproved at the time of Muhammad.

It is admitted that the Koran does not forbid painting or sculpture. The condemnation of pictorial and plastic art is based on the Traditions (hadith) ascribed to the Prophet. He is reported to have said :

1) "Those who will be most severely punished by God on the Day of Judgement are the painters."

2) "The Angels will not enter a house in which there is a picture or a dog."

3) "Those who make images will suffer on the Day of Judgment; they will be called upon to breathe life into the forms that they have fashioned."

4) "Those who will be most severely punished on the Day of Judgment are the murderer of a Prophet, one who has been put to death by a Prophet, one who leads men astray without knowledge, and a maker of images or pictures." 'A head will thrust itself out of the fire and will ask: Where are those who invented lies against God, or have been the enemies of God, or have made light of God? Then men will ask: Who are these three classes of persons? It will answer: The sorcerer is he who has invented lies against God; the maker of images or pictures is the enemy of God; and he who acts in order to be seen of men, is he that has made light of God²."

1. Azraqī : *Akhbār Makka*, Mekka 1352 A. H., Vol 1 pp 106—107.

2. Sir Th. Arnold : *Painting in Islam*, p 6, See also 'Ali al-Muttaqī, *Kanz al-'Ummal*, Vol 2, p 200.

Nawawi, the Shafeite legist of the 13th century, in his *Commentary on Muslim's book of Traditions* summed up the orthodox view on the subject in the following passage¹ :

"The learned authorities of our school² and others hold that the painting of a picture of any living thing is strictly forbidden and is one of the great sins, because it is threatened with the above grievous punishment as mentioned in the Traditions, whether or not it is intended for things to sit on or trample underfoot. So the making of it is forbidden under every circumstance, because it implies a likeness to the creative activity of God ; whether it is on a robe, or a carpet or a coin, gold, silver or copper, or a vessel or on a wall etc. On the other hand, the painting of trees and mountains and other things that have no life is not forbidden. Such is the decision as to the actual making of a picture.

As to using things with pictures of living beings the decision is the following : It is forbidden to make use of any object on which a living thing is pictured, whether it be hung on a wall or worn as a dress or a turban or is on any other object which is not in an inferior status by being sat upon or trampled underfoot. But if it is on a carpet trampled underfoot, or on a pillow or cushion or any similar object of inferior status, then it is not forbidden. In all this there is no difference between what casts a shadow and what does not cast a shadow. This is a short report of the decision of our school on the question.

The majority of the Companions of the Prophet and their immediate followers and the learned of succeeding generations were of an opinion confirming ours ; it is also the view of Thawri, Mâlik, Abu Hanifah and others.

Some authorities in the past believed that the prohibition referred only to objects that cast a shadow, and saw no harm in objects that had no shadow. But this view is quite wrong, for the curtain with the picture to which the Prophet objected was certainly condemned, as everybody admits, yet the picture on it cast no shadow ; and the other Traditions make no difference between one picture and another.

Az-Zuhrî holds that the prohibition refers to pictures in general, and similarly to the use of objects containing them and to entrance into a house in which they are found, whether it is a case of a design on

1. We give here Sir Th. Arnold's translation of the part which he translated of this passage in his *"Painting in Islam"* pp 9—10, except for some changes which were necessary. The rest of the passage is our own translation.

2. i.e. the Shâfi' school.

a dress or any other design, whether the picture hangs on a wall or is on a robe or a carpet, whether in an object of inferior status in common domestic use or not, as is the clear meaning of the Traditions, especially the one, called the Numruqah, which was related by Muslim¹. This is a sound view.

Others admit pictures on textiles whether on objects of inferior status or not; they dislike pictures casting a shadow or painted on walls and similar objects, whether a design or not. They state that the Prophet said in some of the Traditions of this Chapter: "except what is in the form of a design on a dress." This is the view of al-Qasim ibn Muhammad.

All authorities agree in forbidding pictures which cast a shadow and to destroying or mutilating them. Al-Qāṣī takes exception to dolls for little girls to play with; but Mālik does not like a man buying such dolls for his daughters. Some authorities hold that the lawfulness of dolls for girls is made nul by the Traditions which are the object of this commentary"²

That is the orthodox view on the subject summed up by Nawawi, the Shafeite legist of the thirteenth century.



But some orientalists and historians of art hold that the Prophet did not dislike or forbid painting, and that hostility against it started among Muslim theologians in the second half of the second century A.H (VIII A.D.). They argue that Traditions attributed to the Prophet on this subject are apocryphal and represent only the view of the theologians living in the time when the Hadīth was collected and written (ca. III century A.H, IX century A.D). One of the pioneers of those orientalists and art historians was the R.P. Lammens, who wrote an article in the *Journal asiatique* (September — October 1915 pp 239 — 279) entitled "L'Attitude de l'islam primitif en face des arts figurés" His thesis in that article was to prove that the Prophet was not hostile to painting or sculpture and that no such hostility existed in the first century A.H.

One of the most fervent advocates of this theory in our days is Professor K.A.C. Creswell, head of the Institute of Moslem Archaeology in the Fuad I University of Cairo. He adopts it in his monumental work "Early Muslim Architecture" (Vol 1, pp 269 — 271).

But we disagree with that point of view. We believe that hostility to

1. *Sāhih* (Cairo 1334 A.H) Vol 6 p 166

2. Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi : *Al-Minhaj fi Sharh Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj* (Bulaq, 1304—1306 Vol:8 p 398. See also Muslim's *Sahih* Vol 6 pp155 sqq.

images goes back to the time of Muhammad and that it emanated from a horror of paganism and idolatry and from fear that the Arabs might return to the cult which was prevailing among them before Islam. There was, furthermore, the aversion of luxury during that early period of Islam, when the 'Faithful' led a simple life of devotion and fought for the Faith of God.

Shaikh Abd al-Aziz Shāwīsh, one of the modern leading authorities on Moslem theology, wrote the following :

"If the Prophet disallowed having any images whether detached or engraved or painted, it is only because his followers were fresh in leaving idolatry and it was feared for them that they should be attracted by what was worshipped by their ancestors and was familiar to them for a long time."¹

We believe, too, that the unlawfulness of painting and sculpture depended on whether or not the object was in a place of honour. The theologian who registered the Traditions about the prohibition of images did not ascribe to the Prophet something which was altogether of their own creation. All that could be held against them is that they made the prohibition in these Traditions absolute and all-sided. Shaikh 'Abd al-'Aziz Shāwīsh develops this view in the following passage :

"The theological objection to pictorial art was not intended to be general for all times and all nations. In fact such an interdiction would have no *raison d'être* if it is sure that the worship and veneration due to God remain for Him only. How could picture-making be completely prohibited when it could be a means of safeguarding legal rights as is the case with pictures of unknown drowned and dead, pictures which the government exhibits to the public so that these people may be identified by their relatives. Thus can judgment be passed about inheritance, matrimonial matters, liabilities etc . . . Pictures may be a means of warning the public against stealthy thieves and impostors who cover up their tracks and conceal themselves from the government. When their pictures are published, the public can trace them and direct the authorities to their hiding places. Other pictures illustrate the mysteries of the Almighty's power and wisdom in his creations, as is the case in pictures of animals and their different parts, given in books on natural history and anatomy. Some other kinds of pictures, like X-ray photographs, help to cure patients suffering from internal diseases or bullet wounds. One of the principles of religious law is that means

1. See 'Abd al-'Aziz Shāwīsh, *On the attitude of Islam towards images* (in *Al-Hidāya*, Vol 3, pp 487-491)

should be judged by the results and object in view. If some legal judgment or physical treatment or discovery of scientific matters depend on pictures, there is no doubt that making them is a thing approved and wished for by the Divine law. If pictures are only for decoration or licit entertainment, they are lawful. But if they are venerated or worshipped or taken as a source of blessing, they are absolutely forbidden; both the one who makes them and the one who has them are bound to be punished¹.

* * *

Let us now answer the arguments of those who hold that painting was not forbidden or disapproved of in Early Islam.

1) The retention, by the Prophet, of the paintings of Mary and Christ, when going inside the Kaaba after conquering Mekka, and his order effecting the removal and obliteration of the rest of the paintings is a matter of doubt. Some theologians believe that the Prophet did not enter the Kaaba before all paintings and statues were obliterated². But Azraqi, the authority for the story of keeping those two pictures died in 244 A.H. (858)³. He is earlier than Bukhari in whose *Sahih* we read that the prophet had all images removed or obliterated before he went into the sanctuary. Bukhari died in 256 A.H. (870). If, however, we admit that the Prophet ordered that all the pictures should be rubbed out except that of Mary and Jesus, this could be explained by the high opinion the Prophet held of Christianity and the respect he bore for Christ. Furthermore, Muhammad, may have esteemed that it was no source of danger and that none of his followers, all pagans before Islam, would deify that Christian image.

We doubt, however, the veracity of what the same Azraqi adds about that picture having remained in the Kaaba until years later, in 683, when 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr was being besieged in the Holy City by the Umayyad troops. According to Azraqi, it was not until then that the

1. *Ibidem*, See also the similar view of Shaikh Muhammad 'Abdu, the most authoritative of Muslem modern theologians, in *Tārīkh al-Ustaz al-Imam al-shaykh Muhammad 'Abdu* ed. by Mhammad Rāshid Rīda Vol 2 pp 499—501

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See also our article in the *Ihaqfa* no 90 about 'Pictures, Paintings and Statues in mausoleums and Mosques.

2. See their arguments in Azraqi (Mekka ed.) Vol 1 pp 104—105.

3. Dr. H. Haikal pasha adopts that view in his biography of the Prophet "*Hayāt Muhammad*" 2^d. ed p 409, where he writes that the Prophet ordered *all* the pictures in the Kaaba to be obliterated.

picture perished in the fire which destroyed the Kaaba. We think it more probable that the picture was obliterated at the same time as all other images in the Kaaba¹. Some traces of it, however, may have remained till they were completely destroyed in the fire of the Kaaba.

In fact the authority who is credited with having seen that picture before the fire says clearly that he saw it with traces of obliteration on it². This was passed over in silence by Arnold who made use of this story³.

2) One of the arguments given by Professor Creswell to prove that there was no hostility to painting in the Prophet's time is that "Muhammad's wives were acquainted with fabrics woven or embroidered with figures of human beings and animals, and employed them without any religious scruples"⁴. His authority for that are some Traditions in Bukhari. Professor Arnold, however, was more precise. On examining the same Traditions he comes to the conclusion that the Prophet does not appear to have objected to the figures of men or animals on the woven stuffs with which his house in Medina was decorated, *so long as they did not distract his attention while engaged in prayer, and so long as they were in their proper place, being either sat upon in cushions or trampled underfoot in carpets*. When he found that A'ishah had hung up a curtain with figures on it at the door of her room, he exclaimed that those who thus imitated the creative activity of God would be most severely punished on the Day of Judgment; but he was quite satisfied when his wife cut up the offending fabric and made cushion covers out of it⁴.

We are not aware of any Traditions which show that the Prophet accepted at his house and allowed his wives unconditionally the use of woven stuffs with figures of men and animals.

3) It has been also argued that the Companion of the Prophet, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqâs appears to have been untroubled by any iconoclastic scruples. When he entered Ctesiphon after winning the battle of Qâdisiah in 637 A.D. he held a solemn prayer of thanksgiving for the victory of the Muslim armies. The place in which this prayer was held and which he turned into a mosque was Iwan Kisra, the great palace of the Sassanian kings. Tabari expressly states that Sa'd paid no heed to

1. See Azraqî (Mekka ed.) Vol 1 p 106.

2. *Painting in Islam* p 7.

3. A. C. Creswell : *Early Muslim Architecture* Vol 1 p 270.

4. Th. Arnold, *op. cit* p 7.

the figures of men and horses. He did not even touch them. Neither he nor his troops refrained from holding the prayer in that palace because of these figures¹.

This does not prove, however, that there was no objection to pictorial art in Early Islam. If we admit what Tabari wrote, we can explain it by the fact that Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas and his troops were deeply moved at their great victory in capturing the capital of Iran. They, also, had such great confidence in themselves and in their faith. The first thing they did was to hold prayer in the greatest building of the captured city. So anxious they were that they did not care to remove or obliterate the paintings which decorated Khosrau's Iwan. These images did not expose Muslims to danger, because these had not been acquainted with them before Islam and because they had not been worshipped by the Persians. Besides, the Moslems themselves were not in any way responsible for those images.

We cannot refrain from pointing out that victorious armies do not always act according to religious principles.

Some of the paintings in Iwan Kisra survived up to Buhtur's time. This poet, who died in 234 A.H. (897 A.D.) mentions them in his famous poem about that palace of the Sasanian kings. The description of the painting, which represented the fighting between the Persians and the Romans at the siege of Antioch by Anushirwan in 538, is as follows :

When I saw the picture of Antioch, I stood in awe of the
multitudes of Romans and Persians,
With death overhanging and Anushirwan pushing the columns
under the large standard
Having a haughty deportment and dressed in green, yellow
and red
And the fighting of men before him all quiet and without
the least noise,
Some warrior charging with his spear
And another protecting himself with his shield,
They appear life-like and seem to have between each other signs
like those of the dumb.
I could not believe that they were merely pictured before I felt
them with my hands.

1. See Tabari (Cairo ed.) Vol 4 pp 173—174 ; Th. Arnold : *op. cit.* p 8 ; Creswell : *op. cit.* pp 15,270.

4) Neither can we deduce that there was no condemnation of pictorial art in Early Islam from the fact that some Companions of Muhammad and other Moslems felt no hesitation in retaining in their possession woven stuffs and vessels decorated with figures of men and animals¹. In fact they were eager to make use of these stuffs and vessels, and they were not responsible for their images. Further, it is recorded that some of those Moslems destroyed the images and that some of the stuffs were divided between the 'Faithful' in such a way as to deform the ensemble of their pictures. This was the case with the famous carpet of Kisra, which the Caliph Omar distributed among Moslems².

5) A further argument of those who hold that there was no theological objection to pictorial art in Early Islam is that some Arabic coins had figures and drawings. Maqrizî mentioned in his treatise about Muslim coinage that Mu'awiya struck dinars on which there was a figure girt with a sword³. We do not know of any of these coins to-day, but a number of coins with the effigy of Abd al-Malik have been preserved. The Caliph is represented holding a sword in his right hand⁴.

But we do not think that this argument is solid. In fact it is not safe at all to consider the Umayyad Caliphs as authorities in theological subjects. They were far from being model Moslems from the religious point of view. Moreover, such figures on coins were, most probably, not intended to be actual portraits. As Professor Arnold suggested, they were merely a modification of the design which portrayed the Emperor on the Byzantine coins to which the inhabitants of Syria, Palestine and Egypt had been accustomed under the old regime⁵. But this transitional concession to the popular conception of current coinage did not last long. Maqrizî adds that the companions of the Prophet did not object to anything in those new coins except to the figures on them⁶. Later on, about 696 A.D. Abd al-Malik struck new coinage without any pictorial representation.

1. See Arnold : *op. cit.* pp 7—8.

2. Tabari Vol 4 pp 178—178.

3. See *An-Naqûd al-'Arabiyyeh wa 'Ilm an-Mummiyyat ou Monnaies Arabes et Numismatique d'après les Meilleurs Auteurs de Langue Arabe* par le P. Anastase-Masie de St. Elie (Cairo 1939) p 33. Professor Creswell (*op. cit.* p 95 writes that Muawiya himself was represented on these dinars. Silvestre de Sacy (*Bibliothèque des Arabisants Français*, t. I p 19) wrote : "Mouvia fit encore frapper des dinars sur lesquels il était représenté ceint d'une épée."

4. See Th. Arnold, *op. cit.* p 123 and Creswell, *op. cit.* pp 95—96.

5. *Ibidem.*

6. P. Anatsæe-Marie de St-Elie : *op. cit.* p 34.

We do not want to deal here with other coins and medals bearing effigies which were struck by some Abbasid Caliphs and by princes belonging to dynasties of Turkoman origin. Mention may be made of a medal bearing on one side the effigy of the Caliph Mutawakkil and on the other a man leading a camel. On another medal the Caliph Muqadir is represented with a cup of wine in his right hand and a weapon in his left. On the obverse is a musician playing a lute. On a third medal, the caliph Muti' is represented "holding a wine-cup in his hand, with an attendant on either side of him, one holding a musical instrument, the other a cloth with which to drive away flies, on the obverse is a musician playing a five-stringed bute¹." Coins struck for Saladin in northern Mesopotamia bear his effigy sitting on the throne².

6) P. Lammens and Professor Creswell use a further argument to prove that Early Islam was not uniformly hostile to all representation of living forms³. This is that John, Patriarch of Damascus did not mention the Muslims amongst the enemies of images. John was one of the Bani Sardjoun Christian family who served the Umayyads in financial administration more than half a century⁴. He was a boon companion of the Caliph Yazid II, but he lived long after him, and retired to lead a solitary life in one of the monasteries of Damascus. He gave himself up entirely to writing polemic works on the superiority of Christianity to other religions until he died in 754 A.D. It is known that John was one of the most bitter adversaries of iconoclasm. It is argued that had he known that the Muslims were iconoclasts, he would never have failed to mention it and attack them in that field.

On the other hand, one of his disciples in the monastery to which he retired in Damascus, won great fame and had the opportunity, fifty years after his master's death to state that Moslems did forbid painting and sculpture. His name is Theodore Abu Qurra. He lived long enough to become a contemporary of Harûn al-Rashîd and al-Mamun, and was the first father of the Church to write in Arabic. He was also a bitter enemy of the iconoclasts. Abu Qurra did not actually mention the Moslems in connection with iconoclasm, but wrote of "those who assert

1. Arnold, *op. cit* pp 125—126.

2. See Hauteccœur et Wiet, *Les Mosquées du Caire* pp 176-177.

3. See Lammens, *L'Attitude de l'Islam primitif en face des arts figurés* pp 267 and sqq. and Creswell, *op. cit.* p 270.

4. See H. Lammens, *Etude sur le Règne du Calife Omayyade Moawiya 1^{er}* pp 384 sqq.

that he who paints anything living, will be compelled on the Day of Resurrection to breath into it a soul." Lammens pointed out to Professor Creswell that although the Muslims were not actually named "la citation presque verbale du *hadith* musulman prouvent qu'ils sont visés, et de plus que le *hadith* en question était déjà en circulation parmi les musulmans au temps d'Abou Qurra". Professor Creswell concludes that the iconoclastic movement in Islam may be placed towards the latter part of the eighth century.

We can hardly accept this proof. We think that if John of Damascus did not mention that statues and paintings were forbidden in Islam it is because he lived in Syria and saw the Umayyad Castles decorated with paintings and various objects of art. But we know that the Umayyad Caliphs did not keep on the straight and narrow way in matters of religion. The only one of them who is known to have kept in the right path is the Caliph Omar ibn Abd al-'Aziz. We read in his biography a story which shows to what extent he hated painters and paintings. Ibn al-Jawzi († 1200 A.D.), the biographer of this pious Caliph wrote :

"Hussein ibn Wardan related to us that 'Omar ibn Abd al 'Aziz passed by a bath having a picture. He had it rubbed out and exclaimed. "If I could only find out who painted it, I would have him well-beaten".

Abu Qurra, on the other hand, got in touch with the Jurists of Iraq. He knew Arabic well¹ and could Judge the Moslims by what he read in their books and not only by what they practised. No wonder that he was better acquainted than his master John of Damascus with the attitude of Islam towards pictorial art.

7) P. Lammens and Professor Creswell draw an inference that images were not prohibited in the Prophet's time from the fact that Arabs in the Hijaz did not know any graven images at that early time of Islam. "Un seul texte (Qoran, 22, 31) nous laisse en suspens", wrote P. Lammens. "Il recommande d'éviter l'impureté des awthan. Faut-il comprendre images ou fétiches, le terme *awthan* comportant cette double signification ? Idoles ou fétiches, la Qoran n'en interdit nulle part la fabrication, parce que, nous le verrons tantôt, cette interdiction n'avait pas de sens en Arabie. Quant à la peinture, le recueil n'y fait jamais une allusion explicite. On y rencontre bien le terme *soura*, mais dans la langue

1. Creswell : *ibid* pp 270—271.

2. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sirat Omar ibn Abd al-'Aziz*: p 80, cf. Arnold : *op. cit.* p 46.

3. See C. Brockelman, F. N. Finck J. Leopoldt und E. Littmann. *Geschichte der Christlichen Literaturen des Orients* p. 68.

qoranique il désigne non — comme plus tard — les images, mais les formes extérieures, les dimensions géométriques des corps. Comment expliquer cette attitude, cette indifférence de Mahomet à l'endroit des idoles ? Par la nature spéciale du polythéisme à son époque et dans son Arabie à lui, celle du Higaz et du Nagd limitrophe, à l'exclusion du Yemen, de l'ancienne Nabatéé et des cantons soumis à l'influence des régions syro-mésopotamiennes. La religion preislamique de la Péninsule, ainsi délimitée relève entièrement du fétichisme. C'est un culte à l'usage des Bedouins — race médiocrement religieuse — culte d'origine nomade, même lorsque — c'était le cas pour la Ka'ba — le centre se trouve fixé dans une agglomération citadine. Ce culte sans temple, sans liturgie, sans hiérarchie proprement dite, ne fabrique pas ses dieux : il les rencontre dans la nature. Au lieu d'effigies divines, il honore les pierres et sous les formes les plus variées, rochers, blocs erratiques, stèles, obélisques Toutes les anciennes idoles plus ou moins historiques : Manat, Al-Lat, Ozza, Dou' Halasa, Fals, Sa'd, Oqaisir etc., appartiennent à la catégorie des *acheropita*, pour me servir de ce terme emprunté à l'archéologie chrétienne : pierres brutes, protubérances rocheuses, blocs tenant encore au sol, bizarrement corrodés par les agents atmosphériques et où, avec de l'imagination, on croyait parfois découvrir de vagues linéaments humains”

When Profesor Creswell read the argunents which we give in this article, he wrote to me.” In the time of Muhammed this question (horror of paganism and idolatry, and fear that the Arabs might return to the cult which was prevailing among them before Islam) did not arise. It is very doubtful if any 'graven images' existed in the Hijaz, for the Arabs practised litholatry, worship of shapeless pieces of stone. When the Muslims got far away from the pagan (i.e. litholatry) life, they found themselves in countries where there were statues in public places in the cities. It was then that the danger began, not before, in Arabia, where lumps of stone, because of their bizarre form or meteoric origin were revered.”

We think, however, that this argument is miscalculated. It is true that the Arabs worshipped stones before Islam. Ibn al-Kalbi wrote that this litholatry originated in an old Arabian immemorial usage: no traveller left Mekka without carrying with him a stone from the Kaaba, as a token of reverence to the House of the Gods and of love for the Holy city.

1. Lammens, *L'attitude de l'Islam* pp 242—244.

Wherever the traveller took up his quarters or pitched his tent, he used to put down the stone from the Ka'ba and walk round it as he used to walk round the Kaaba itself¹. Some of these stones were a cubic piece of rock like "Al-Lal"², or a slab of white stone like "dhi al-Khalasa"³, or a long piece of rock like "Sa'd"⁴ or a protuberance in the mountain resembling a human figure like "al-Fals"⁵. The pre-islamic Arabs used also to worship some houses as they used to worship the Kaaba in Mekka. Among such houses there are "Riam"⁶ in San'a, the kaaba of Bani al-Hārith ibn Ka'b in Nagran,⁷ the kaaba of Iyad between Kufa and Basra⁸ and the church of al-Qalis⁹ in San'a.

But it is incorrect to assume that the pre-islamic Arabs did not know any graven images except in the outskirts of the peninsula. The old Arab historians, and specially Ibn al-Kalbi¹⁰ († 204 A.H., 819 A.D.) mentioned among the idols worshipped by the Arabs, some statues resembling human figures, in the Hijaz and in the Kaaba itself. Among these images is "Hobal," which was of red chalcedony, having the figure of a human being with a broken right hand. When the tribe of Quraish planted itself in this region, they made him a golden hand¹¹. The Kalbites in Daumat al-Djandal used to worship "Wadd", which was the statue of a powerful man armed to the teeth¹².

Among such images there are also Isaf and "Na'ila". They are thought to have been originally a man and a woman of the tribe of "Jurhum." They entered once the Kaaba and, seizing the opportunity of nobody watching them, they were guilty of misconduct. They were metamorphosed into two stones, which the Arabs placed near the Kaaba as a bad example and a warning to anybody who failed to respect the holy temple. They remained a long time there, and when the Arabs began

1. Ibn al-Kalbi : *Kitāb al-Asnām* (2nd ed.) p 6.

2. *ibid* p 16.

3. *ibid* p 34. See also D. Nielsen, *Handbuch der Arabischen Altertumskunde* p 231.

4. Ibn al-Kalbi : *ibid* pp 36—37.

5. *ibid* p 59.

6. *ibid* pp 11—12.

7. *ibid* pp 44—45.

8. *ibid* p 45.

9. *ibid* p 46.

10. Cf. J. Wellhausen : *Reste Arabischen Heidentums* (2^e ed. Berlin 1927) pp 10—13.

11. Ibn al-Kalbi : *ibid* p. 28; cf. J. Wellhausen, *op. cit.* p 75, Aziqī, *op. cit.* pp 69.

12) Ibn al-Kalbi, *ibid* pp 10,56.

to practise idolatry, these two images were among the idols which they worshipped."¹

Moreover, the Arabic lexicographers and writers differed in opinion about the definition of "Asnām" in a way bearing witness to their having known real statues as well as natural idols. "Some of them said that idolized pieces of stone are "Ansāb". If real statues, they are "Asnām" and "Awthān." Others said that idols made of wood, gold or silver in the form of human beings are "Asnam"; if made of stone, they are "Awthān"²

In a verse of the thirty-seventh sura of the Koran, mention is made of carving. The following is related of Abraham when his tribesmen came back to him with hasty steps he said, "Worship ye what ye carve when God hath created you and that ye make?"³

We have also to mention what the Arab historians and learned men of the "Hadith" reported about the 360 images found in the Kaaba when Mekka was conquered by the Prophet. If we admit that there was not enough place in that temple for such a big number of idols, it is nevertheless true that the Kaaba contained many idols for different Arab tribes. At least many of these idols are spoken of by historians as having eyes and faces.⁴

There is no doubt that the Arabs knew real statues before the Muslim Conquests⁵. They ascribed their introduction into Hijaz to Amr ibn Lohay who brought the first statues from Palestine and put them round the Kaaba⁶.

We should bear in mind, moreover, that many of the Arabs of the Hijaz before Islam were familiar with Syria and Yemen. They used to carry goods and conduct caravans between the north and south parts of the peninsula⁷.

1. *ibid* pp 9, 29; cf. J. Wellhausen, *op. cit.* p 77; Azraqi *op. cit.* pp 44,45,69—71.

2. Ibn al-Kalbi *ibid* pp 33,53; Ahmad Taymur (ed. Zaky M. Hassan) : *Al-Taswir 'end al-'Arab* pp 43—49; cf. J. Wellhausen, *op. cit.* p 102.

3. J. M. Rodwell : *The Koran translated from the Arabic* p 82.

4. Ibn al-Kalbi, *op. cit.* p 31, Azraqi, *op. cit.* p 71; Ph. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (2^d ed.) p 100.

5. Mordtmann, Müller and Nielsen mention the two antelope golden statues which 'Abd al Muttalib found when he dug out Zamzam, the famous well. See J. H. Mordtmann and D. H. Müller, *Sabäische Denkmäler* (Wien 1883) p 10 and D. Nielsen, *op. cit.* p 237. See also J. Wellhausen, *op. cit.* p 76.

6. Ibn al-Kalbi *op. cit.* p 8; cf. J. Wellhausen, *op. cit.* p 72.

7. D. Nielsen, *op. cit.* pp 110 sqq.

Nielsen thinks even that it is in Northern Arabia and not in Southern Arabia that the representation of Gods in images was known.

"Die bildliche Darstellung von Göttern in der religiösen Kunst kommt im Heidentum nur in Nordarabien als nordsemitische Entlehnung vor und hört mit dem Bilderverbot im Islam völlig auf!"

Wellhausen mentioned that the Arabs used to engrave some of the holy stones in order to create a similarity between them and human beings. "Manche (Steine) sind etwas bearbeitet, indem eine natürlichen Ähnlichkeit etwa mit einem Menschenhaupte, durch Kunst nachgeholfen ist, wie Dhul Chalaça und al Galsad. Sie machen den Übergang zu eigenlichen Bildern. Diese hat man von den Steinen wohl zu unterscheiden².

H) Again it is thought that the Prophet could not have had an intolerent attitude towards figured art, if we judge by a conversation between his wives sitting round his bed during his last illness. Two of the Prophet's wives, Umm Salamah and Umm Habība had been to Abyssinia. They spoke of a church, St Mary's, which they had seen there and praised its beauty and the splendour of its pictures.

In fact Ibn Sa'd's text on that subject does not show that Muhammad shared his wives' enthusiasm for those pictures. This author, who died about 844 A.D. states expressly that the Prophet joined in the conversation and said : "It is the custom of these Abyssians, when one of their holy men dies, to build a house of prayer over his tomb, and paint such pictures in it. Such people are most wicked in the sight of God³."

1) Finally, we cannot say that there was no objection to pictorial art in Early Islam, simply because of the many figured objects of art and paintings which we know of the Umayyad period. In fact the theological objection to paintings and statues is a definite thing, while the attitude of certain persons toward that objection is absolutely something else. Many a thing had been prohibited by the Koran but was practised by the Umayyad Caliphs and by many Muslims of their time, We do not expect anybody to hold that wine was not prohibited by Islam, simply because some Umayyad Caliphs and other Muslims used to drink it in Early Islam.

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1. *ibid* p. 187; cf. also pp 201,231.

2. J. Wellhausen, *op. cit.* p 102.

3. Cf. Th. Arnold, *op. cit.* pp 6—7 and Creswell, *op. cit.* pp 270 and Ibn Sa'd ; *Biographien* Vol 2 p 34.

Thus we come to the conclusion that pictorial art, in its different forms was disliked in the Prophet's time. The theologians, however, may have exaggerated in putting into Muhammad's mouth, these traditions which mean strict and absolute prohibition. On the other hand, we do not believe that the objection to pictorial art was meant to be general. In fact it is not a part of the Muslim credo.¹ Further, the fundamental cause of that objection is the horror of idolatry and the suspicion with which a statue or a picture was regarded "through apprehension of the possible influence it might exercise on the faithful by leading them astray into the heresy most abhorred by Muslim theologians, *shirk*, or the giving a partner to God."² It cannot be meant for all times and circumstances especially when Muslims get far away from the pagan life of Pre-Islam and when they become a powerful nation full of confidence in their faith and power, and lastly when picture-making proves to have so many scientific and artistic uses which nobody can deny.

Zaky M. Hassan

1. We must recall that the Koran does not prohibit pictorial art. Professor Creswell did not do Ali al'Enani justice in writing that he—Enani—suggested that Quran II, 92, contains such a prohibition. He translated that verse as, "Oh, ihr, die ihr glaubt, siehe der Wein, das Spiel, die Bilder und die Pfeile sind ein Greuel von Satans Werk. Meidet sie." Dr. Enani has actually translated the word *Ansab* into "Bilder" which means, "images", but he explained it in detail and asserted that he meant paintings and statues which were deified or used as good omens. He even says expressly that the Koran does not prohibit any other images except those. He mentions that Solomon was allowed to use pictures and statues for reasonable ends. See A. Enani : *Beurteilung der Bilderfrage im Islam nach der Ansicht eines Muslim*" pp 9—10 and especially p. 10, lines 10—16.

2. Th. Arnold, *op. cit.* pp 10—11.