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KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE
IN
EARLY ARABIA.

BY
W. ROBERTSON SMITH,
LORD ALMONER'S PROFESSOR OF ARABIC IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF CAMBRIDGE.

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1885

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107622029

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First published 1885

First paperback edition 2014

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-62202-9 Paperback

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P R E F A C E.

THE object of the present volume is to collect and discuss the available evidence as to the genesis of the system of male kinship, with the corresponding laws of marriage and tribal organisation, which prevailed in Arabia at the time of Mohammed; the general result is that male kinship had been preceded by kinship through women only, and that all that can still be gathered as to the steps of the social evolution in which the change of kinship law is the central feature corresponds in the most striking manner with the general theory propounded, mainly on the basis of a study of modern rude societies, in the late J. F. McLennan's book on *Primitive Marriage*. The correspondence of the Arabian facts with this general theory is indeed so close that all the evidence might easily have been disposed under heads

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borrowed from his exposition ; and for those who are engaged in the comparative study of early institutions this would probably have been the most convenient arrangement. But the views of my lamented friend are not so widely known as they deserve to be, and several of the *Essays* in which they are expressed are not very accessible. Moreover I wished to speak not only to general students of early society but to all who are interested in old Arabia ; for if my results are sound they have a very important bearing on the most fundamental problems of Arabian history and on the genesis of Islam itself. I have therefore thought it best to attempt to build a self-contained argument on the Arabian facts alone, following a retrogressive order from the known to the unknown past, and not calling in the aid of hypotheses derived from the comparative method until, in working backwards on the Arabian evidence, I came to a point where the facts could not be interpreted without the aid of analogies drawn from other rude societies. This mode of exposition has its disadvantages, the most serious of these being that

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the changes in the tribal system which went hand in hand with the change in the rule of kinship do not come into view at all till near the close of the argument. In the earlier chapters therefore I am forced to argue on the supposition that a local group was also a stock-group, as it was in the time of the prophet; while in the two last chapters it appears that this cannot always have been the case. But I trust that the reader, if he looks back upon the earlier chapters after reaching the end of the book, will see that this result has been tacitly kept in view throughout, and that the substance of the argument involves nothing inconsistent with it.

The first chapters of the book do not, I think, borrow any principle from the comparative method which cannot be completely verified by Arabian evidence. These chapters are rewritten and expanded from a course of public University lectures delivered in the Easter Term of the current year, and my original idea was to confine the present volume to the ground which they cover. I found however that to break off the argument

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at this point would be very unsatisfactory both to the author and to the reader, and that, to round off my results even in a provisional way, it was absolutely necessary to say something as to the ultimate origin of the tribal system. And here it is not possible to erect a complete argument on the Arabian evidence alone. But it is, I think, possible to shew that the Arabs once had the system which McLennan has expounded under the name of totemism (chap. vii.), and if, as among other early nations, totemism and female kinship were combined with a law of exogamy, it is also possible to construct, on the lines laid down in *Primitive Marriage*, a hypothetical picture of the development of the social system, consistent with all the Arabian facts, and involving only *verae causae*, i.e., only the action of such forces as can be shewn to have operated in other rude societies in the very way which the hypothesis requires (chap. viii.). I have thought it right to limit myself, in this part of the subject, to the briefest possible outline. The general principles of the hypothesis, as laid down by J. F. McLennan, are

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not, I believe, likely to be shaken, but it is premature to attempt more than the most provisional sketch of the way in which they operated under the special historical conditions existing in the Arabian peninsula.

The collection of the evidence on which my arguments rest has occupied me at intervals since the autumn of 1879, when I put together a certain number of facts about female kinship and totemism in a paper on "Animal worship and animal tribes among the Arabs and in the Old Testament," which was published in the *Journal of Philology*, vol. ix. At that time I had access to no good library of Arabic texts, so that I could only pick up what lay on the surface of the unsearched field; but the results of this provisional exploration appeared so promising that it seemed desirable to publish them and to invite the cooperation of scholars better versed in the early literature of Arabia. Several orientalist of mark responded to this invitation; in particular Prof. Th. Nöldeke sent me some valuable observations, which have since been incorporated in his review of Prof. G. A. Wilken's book, *Het Matriarchaat*

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bij de oude Arabieren (*Oester. Monatschrift f. d. Orient*, 1884), and Prof. Ignaz Goldziher contributed a list of important references to the *ḥadīth* and other sources in a letter to the *Academy*, July 10, 1880. The *ḥadīth* (traditions of the prophet) was not used at all in my paper, but I had begun to search through it in the winter of 1879–80, when a visit to Cairo enabled me also to procure extracts from Tabarī's Coran commentary, of which some specimens are given in the notes to the present volume. The next contribution to the subject was Prof. Wilken's book, already cited, which appeared at Amsterdam in 1884. Most of the facts on which Prof. Wilken builds are simply copied from my paper and Dr Goldziher's letter, but he adds a very useful collection of the traditional evidence about *mot'a* marriage, for which he had the assistance of Dr Snouck Hurgronje. On this topic I had briefly touched in a note to my *Prophets of Israel* (1882), p. 408; but Prof. Wilken was the first to bring it into connection with the rule of female kinship. Another new point to which Prof. Wilken devotes considerable attention is the import-

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ance attached in ancient and modern Arabia to the relationship of maternal uncle and nephew; and what he has said on this head plays a chief part in the controversy between him and Dr Redhouse, which has produced the two latest publications on the subject of female kinship in Arabia (J. W. Redhouse, *Notes on Prof. E. B. Tylor's "Arabian Matriarchate"* [1885]; G. A. Wilken, *Eenige Opmerkingen naar aanleiding eener critiek van mijn "Matriarchaat bij de oude Arabieren,"* The Hague 1885). Some points in both these papers are touched on in the following pages, but I have not found occasion to go into the controversy in detail, as my interpretation of the whole evidence differs fundamentally from that of the Dutch scholar. It will be seen from this survey that by much the larger part of the evidence which I have used had to be collected without assistance from any predecessor, and I have not been able to extend my search over more than a moderate part of the vast field of early Arabic literature. On the other hand, while I have tried to give specimens of all the types of evidence that have come under my observation, I could

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easily have multiplied examples of many of these types.

The notes appended to the volume contain a variety of illustrative matter, and in some cases take the shape of excursions on topics of interest which could not have been brought into the text without breaking the flow of the argument.

In conclusion I desire to express my thanks to my friend and colleague Prof. W. Wright for valuable help in all parts of the book, and to my friend Mr D. McLennan for many important criticisms and suggestions on the first six chapters.

W. ROBERTSON SMITH.

CHRIST'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.
Oct. 26, 1885.

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