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Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics

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The Hindus observe the new moon of the month, *Bhādrapada* (September–October), in honour of the dead. 'On this day the head of a family must perform prescribed ceremonies for the preceding three generations.' The celebration is for such of the dead as may not have received the usual rites of sepulture. The fact shows, by negation, that the commemoration is the repetition of the event. The annual *śrāddhas* are well known. Their object is to 'assist the departed spirit in the various experiences it will have to pass through. At the same time, the one who duly performs these rites and ceremonies thereby lays up merit for himself and his family, which merit will be duly carried to the credit of his account hereafter.' One *śrāddha* is to provide the spirit with an 'intermediate body.' Another indicates the union of the dead with his immediate ancestors. The monthly *śrāddhas* commence on the 30th day after death. An annual ceremony is performed on the anniversary of the death.*

A slight shifting of the point of view will show the parallelism between such practices as the Hindu and the early Christian principle that the birth-day of the martyr was the day on which he died. The death-day of the faithful was regarded as their birth into a new life. The 'natale' *par excellence* was the day of death. It was a nativity to a glorious crown in the kingdom of heaven. Tertullian observes that St. Paul was born again by a new nativity at Rome because he suffered martyrdom there. Such *natalia* were contrasted with 'natural birth-days,' as spiritual in opposition to worldly. The 'birth-days' of martyrs, celebrated at the grave or monument, had a profound influence on the development of ecclesiastical institutions. The celebration was a service, at which the Communion was received. The ethical principle involved was imitation of the martyr, repetition in others of his life and death. The *fasti* of martyrs were gradually compiled, and churches were erected over their bones, the bones sometimes being replaced under the altar.†

The festivals of gods are frequently their birth-days. Thus the Hindu festival *Śrīrāmajayanti* celebrates the birth-day of Rāma, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu. The image of the god is adorned and carried in procession. Pilgrimage is made to the temple. *Kṛṣṇajayanti* is the birth-day of Kṛṣhna, and is one of the most popular of the annual festivals. The *Bhāgavata* describing the life of the god is read on that day. *Vināyakachaturthī* is the birth-day festival of Gaṇeśa. Every house sets up an image of the god, before which lights are placed. A *mantra* of consecration, *pratiṣṭā*, is pronounced, on which the spirit of the god enters the image.

In such acts we see a ritual re-creation of the divinity, a repetition of his birth.

At this feast, artisans worship their tools, and students their books, placing them before the image. Gaṇeśa is the god who is invoked in all undertakings, and who helps man on his way.‡

In Christianity the birth-day of Christ is only less important than the Passion and the Resurrection. Even here the social aspect of religion is prominent, and, by a coincidence, the date finally decided upon is that celebrated in paganism as the annual birth-day of the Sun, just as the weekly day of the sun, the Christian Sunday, was the weekly birth-day of the Solar Deity, and in Hebrew mythology the first day of Creation.

LITERATURE.—*HDB* and *EBi*, s.v. 'Birthday'; Bingham, *Christian Antiquities*, 1840; J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, 1892 ff.; A. E. Ellis, *The Tebi-speaking Peoples*,

* Padfield, *op. cit.* 165, 217, 226.

† Bingham, vii. 340 ff., 350 ff., 422.

‡ Padfield, *op. cit.* 178 ff., 181, 183.

1887; J. E. Padfield, *The Hindu at Home*², 1908; B. H. Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*⁴, 1902. A. E. CRAWLEY.

BIRTH-DAYS (Greek and Roman).—Birth-day celebrations are to be met with in antiquity from a very early date. Æschylus presupposes them when he makes Apollo receive on his birth-day his oracle as a present from Phœbe (*Eumenides*, 6–8). Birth-days were celebrated with prayers, sacrifices, and banquets, and it was also the custom to offer presents to the person whose birth-day it was (e.g. a book, *Anthol. Pal.* ix. 93). Sometimes those who were born on the same day of the month formed a society, and called themselves *τετραδιστάλ*, *εκαδιστάλ*, etc. Later, it was frequently the custom for such societies to celebrate the birth-days of members of distinction, or these members themselves left an endowment to enable their associates to celebrate their birth-day even after their death. Such a posthumous celebration was called *γενέσιον*, whereas the celebration during a man's lifetime was termed *γενέθλια* (schol. Plato, *Alcibiades*, 121 C). Plato's birth-day was celebrated by the Academy on the 7th of Thargelion, because Apollo was supposed to have been born on that day; and in other cases as well the celebrations of birth-days were fixed for sacred days (Plut. *Theseus*, 36; the Athenians mention the 8th of a month as the birthday of Theseus, *ἐκ Πρωσειδῶνος γεγονέναι λεγόμενον*: καὶ γὰρ Πρωσειδῶνα ταῖς ὀγδόαις τιμῶσιν). From the time of the Diadochi we often hear of the celebration of the birth-days of kings, and from the time of Cæsar, of those of emperors (there is an important inscription which indicates that in Asia Minor the year began with the birth-day of Augustus [*Athen. Mitt.* xxiv. 288]), when festivities, games, etc., took place. The same honour was also extended to empresses and princes.

These honours passed from persons to cities: thus in Rome the *Palilia* was celebrated as the *natalis urbis*. More especially were such honours transferred to the gods: Athene was supposed to have been born on the 3rd of a month, Hermes on the 4th, Apollo on the 7th, and so on. In these cases the festival must always have been the *præius*, the birth-day the *posterius*. It often happens that the birthday of the god and the *natalis templi* coincide (Cic. *ad Att.* iv. i. 4, *CIL* xii. 3058).

LITERATURE.—Chr. Petersen, 'Ueber die Geburtstagsfeier bei den Griechen,' in *Jahrb. f. klass. Philol.*, Suppl. ii., 1867; W. Schmidt, *Geburtstag im Altertum*, Giessen, 1908.

W. KROLL.

BIRTHRIGHT.—See **INHERITANCE**.

BISHOP.—See **MINISTRY**.

BISMILLĀH.—1. Meaning and early usage.—*Bismillāh*(ī), an Arabic expression signifying 'in the name of Allah,' was borrowed by Muḥammad from the religious phraseology of Jews and Christians,* and was formulated by him in full as follows: *bismillāhi-r-rahmāni-r-rahīmi*, 'in the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.' Muḥammad employed the phrase both in its shorter and in its complete form as an introductory formula, designed to connect the beginnings of action with the devout remembrance of God, and it is probable that, while still resident at Mecca, he recommended his adherents to use it in a similar way. In the Qur'an he represents Noah as summoning the faithful to enter the ark with the words, 'Bismillāh ("in the name of Allah") be its voyage and its landing' (xi. 43); and, similarly, a letter purporting to have been written by King Solomon to the Queen of Sheba opens thus: '*Bismillāhi-r-rahmāni-r-rahīmi*' (xxvii. 30). Probably, too, he began his own ceremonial discourses, as collected in the Qur'an, * Nöldeke, *Gesch. d. Qorāns* (Göttingen, 1860), p. 88 [published by F. Schwally] 116 f.].

with the phrase, and the redactors of the sacred volume, in prefixing it (in plenary form) to the various *sūras*, evidently regarded it as a prefatory formula having Muḥammad's own sanction. We cannot divine the reason of its omission from the 9th *sūra*, although the Muslim exegetes show no perplexity in the matter, and provide several explanations, as may be found in commentaries to the Qur'ān. The earlier theologians of Islām were at variance with each other regarding the question whether the *bismillāhi*-formula at the beginning of the *sūras* was to be considered an article of revelation, i.e. an utterance of God, or an item proceeding from the Prophet himself; but eventually the former alternative carried the day, and it came to be held that everything between the two covers (*bāina-l-daffatain*) of the book, including, of course, the prefatory formula of the *sūras*, was the word of God.

It is recorded that, before Muḥammad arose, the heathen Qurāish made use of the sacred formula *bismika Allāhumma* ('in thy name, O God') for a similar purpose—a statement which is certainly credible, though we have no evidence to test it by. According to Arabic tradition, which delights to associate every particular custom with the name of an individual founder, the person who introduced the use of this phrase into Mecca was Umayya b. Abi-l-Naṭl, the reputed author of many apocryphal poems which promulgated monotheistic and Biblical ideas before the time of Muḥammad. Umayya is said to have learned the formula, as a potent talisman against the evil influence of demonic powers, from the lips of a Christian hermit, and to have made personal trial of it.* But as he was an older contemporary of Muḥammad, and survived the latter's entrance upon his public career, the older formula cannot, agreeably to the above tradition, have been in use long before the Prophet's day. It is even said, indeed, that Muḥammad himself had employed it, but that the revelation of certain verses in the Qur'ān (xi. 95, xxvii. 80) induced him to substitute, or it, first the shorter, and then the longer, form of the *bismillāh*.† Nevertheless he would appear, according to Muslim tradition, to have sometimes resorted to the earlier Meccan formula even at a later period;‡ thus in a treaty which he made with the people of Mecca near Hudalbiyah in A.H. 6, he deferred to the vigorous opposition they offered to the new formula introduced by him, and quite readily sanctioned the use of the Qurāish '*bismika Allāhumma*' as a heading to the document.§ '*Allāhumma*' is also approved as an invocation of God in Muslim petitions.

We may regard it as historically established that rescripts drawn up by Muḥammad's instructions, contracts concluded between him and tribes which yielded him their allegiance,¶ and even records of a more private character,‡‡ were usually prefaced by the plenary form of the *bismillāh*.** Thereafter its insertion in similar documents as a prefatory formula became part of the religious practice of the adherents of Islām.†† Official records from the early age of Islām, preserved either as transcriptions in historical works, or, more authentically still, as originals on papyrus sheets, always begin with the *bismillāh*. It is also found on textile fabrics and other products of industrial art.‡‡ In bilingual (Arabic-Greek) documents, which were common, especially in the Egyptian province, till far on in the Umayyad period, the Greek portion contains a translation of the formula, the shorter appearing as *ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ θεοῦ*, while the plenary form expands this with the words *τοῦ ἐλεημονοῦ φιλανθρώπου*.§§

* Aghāni, iii. 189; Mas'ūdi, *Prairies d'or*, i. 142; cf. Schultze in the *Noideke-Festschrift*, 74, n. 6.

† Ibn Sa'd in Wellhausen, *Skizzen u. Vorarbeiten*, iv. (Berlin, 1899), 6, 9 (text), 104 (tr.).

‡ Leone Caetani, *Annali dell' Islam*, ii. (Milan, 1907) 222.

§ Ibn Hishām, ed. Wüstenfeld, 747.

¶ Examples in Noldeke-Schwally, *op. cit.* 117, n. 1.

‡‡ e.g. a note regarding the distribution of the wheat brought as booty from Khaibar (Ibn Hishām, 776, 778 ff.).

** L. Caetani (*op. cit.* i. 396, ii. 793) doubts the authenticity of this prefatory formula in documents given by Muslim historians.

†† e.g. in the *Testament of 'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd*, in Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, vi. 112, 113.

‡‡ Karabacek, 'Zur arabischen Alterthumskunde', ii. Die arabischen Papyrusprotokolle,' in *SWA W* cxli. (Vienna, 1903) 35 ff.

§§ e.g., in the bilingual documents in Karabacek, *op. cit.* 63-67; C. H. Becker, *Papyrus Schott-Rainharth*, i. (Heidelberg, 1906), 109 ff.; *ZA* xxii. 160, 170-178.

In accordance with the common Arabic practice of giving a convenient name to formulas by the device of omitting some of their constituent letters (as, e.g., *ḥamdala* for '*al-ḥamdu lillāhi*,' *ḥay'ala* for *ḥayya 'ala-ṣ-salāti*, etc.), the *bismillāh* is contracted to *basmala*, which is also a verb meaning 'to utter the *bismillāh*'; and the use of the formula is also referred to as *tasmiya*, the invocation of the name (*ism*) of God.

2. Ceremonial use.—The *bismillāh* acquires a special ceremonial significance as the formula of benediction pronounced before slaughtering animals for food—a usage which, without doubt, was suggested by the Jewish law enjoining the utterance of the *brākāh* before killing and eating. The relevant injunction in the Qur'ān is found in vi. 118, 121: 'Eat of that over which the name of Allah hath been pronounced if ye believe in His signs' . . . 'Eat not therefore of that on which the name of Allah hath not been named, for that were certainly sin.' From this passage was argued the obligatory use of the *tasmiya** before slaughter; and, similarly, it was required that the benediction in Allah's name should precede the eating of the flesh of animals prescribed for that purpose. Even in the chase (v. 6) it was imperative to utter the name of Allah before releasing the falcon or the hound, and only on this condition could the quarry be afterwards used as food.† In pursuance of a hermeneutic practice of later Muhammadan theologians, certain theological schools attenuated the character of this absolutely binding ordinance to that of a mere wish, and in this way the omission of the actual utterance of Allah's name before the act of killing did not necessarily proscribe the use of the animal for food. If, for example, the observance of the regulation had been inadvertently neglected, the food might still be partaken of without misgiving—for, of course, the thought of Allah is never absent from the devout heart. But it is obvious that these interpretations and practical accommodations are at variance with the actual language of the injunction as given in the Qur'ān—a fact emphatically insisted upon in the teaching of the more rigid and literalistic interpreters of the book.‡

Another question of ceremonial relating to the use of the *bismillāh* arises in connexion with the Muhammadan ritual of prayer (*ṣalāt*). The latter, as is well known, begins with the recitation of the 'opening' *sūra* of the Qur'ān (*al-fātiha*), whose first sentence is the *bismillāh* in its complete form. It has been from early times a subject of debate in the schools of the law whether this introductory phrase should be spoken aloud (*jāhran*) or in an inaudible whisper—a controversy connected in its origin with the disputed question already referred to, viz. whether the *bismillāh* is to rank as Divine revelation or not. Most of the orthodox schools decided that the formula might be uttered in an undertone,§ but the Shāfi'ites, and especially the Sh'ites, demand that it be spoken in an audible voice.¶

3. Everyday use.—Having dealt with the use of the *bismillāh* in ceremonial functions and in im-

* But without *al-rahmān al-rahim*, as it was not thought right, when taking away life, to name 'the Compassionate Merciful' (*ZDMG* xlviii. 95, n. 1).

† *Muwatta'a*, ii. 356.

‡ Cf. the present writer's *Die Zāhiriten* (Leipzig, 1884), 75 ff.

§ It is expressly recorded of 'Omar II. that, when leading in prayer, he did not pronounce the *bismillāh* of the *fātiha* audibly (*la yajharu*) (Ibn Sa'd, v. 246, 25). The Khalif al-Musta'in was accused by his opponents of double-dealing, because he spoke the *bismillāh* of the *fātiha* inaudibly when in Samarra, but elsewhere hypocritically uttered it aloud (Tabari, *Annales*, iii. 1683, 3 ff.).

¶ On this question see the present writer's 'Beiträge zur Literaturgesch. der Shi'a u. d. sunnitischen Polemik,' *SWA W* (1874), 15 ff., 86.

portant affairs of public and private life, we proceed to speak of a view which sprang up in Islām at a very early period, and soon established itself in everyday practice—the view, namely, which finds expression in a proverb commonly regarded as a saying (*hadīth*) of the Prophet: *Kullu amrin dhī balīn la yubtada'u bi-dhikri 'Ullāhi fahuwa abtaru*, i.e. 'every matter of importance which is begun without mention of God is maimed.' This maxim was taken by devout adherents of Islām as their warrant for the practice of inaugurating every action† by ejaculating a *bismillāh*. The prophet is traditionally reported to have said that Satan sits behind every one who mounts an animal without first having uttered the formula.‡ Its use as a blessing before meals is regarded as of special importance, and on social occasions the saying of the *bismillāh* by the head of the household intimates to the guests that the repast is to begin.§ Nor must the *tasmiya* be omitted when a person enters or leaves a house, or puts on his clothes.|| The practice is felt to be in accordance with the thought of Qur'an xxxiii. 41: 'Remember Allah with frequent remembrance'—a maxim highly approved in Islām. The idea that the utterance of God's holy name involves an impiety never found a footing among the Muslims, who are wont to say, rather, that if we love a person we often mention his name (*man aḥabba shay'an akthara dhikrahu*).¶

4. Superstitious ideas and use.—The deep significance and the sacred character with which Islām invested the *bismillāh* led at length to its being pressed into the service of folk-lore, mysticism, and even magic. It was said that God had inscribed it upon the breast of Adam, the wing of the angel Gabriel, the seal of Solomon, and the tongue of Jesus.** The Creator has written the sacred words upon His works. The imaginative eye can sometimes trace the formula in the veins of the leaf or the varied colourings of the butterfly's wing, where nature has imprinted it in mystic (Syriac) characters. The written and oral application of the *bismillāh* possesses talismanic virtues. When the soul in its death-struggle is striving to escape from the body, the angel of death brings from paradise an apple upon which is inscribed the formula, or the angel himself writes it upon the palm of the dying man, whose agony is alleviated by the sight of it, and whose soul then yields itself to the angel.†† The *bismillāh* serves also as a means of defence against the baneful effects of the evil eye, and other malign influences of occult forces. It is a popular notion amongst Muhammadans that the *jinn* are easily offended, as, for instance, by human encroachment upon their haunts, by pouring out hot water, etc.; but if a man feels that he has provoked their resentment, he may drive them away by uttering the *bismillāh*.‡‡ Similarly, in order to render his goods proof against the *jinn*, he uses the phrase as a charm when he shuts the door, or stores articles of food in their appropriate receptacles, or lays down his clothes at night. An article protected in this way is called *musammā* (commonly pronounced *musemmī*),

* Originally *bi-hamdi*, with reference to the glorifying of God by formulas beginning with *al-hamdu lillāhi*.

† Including that mentioned by Buchārī, *K. al-wuḍū*, No. 8.

‡ Damiri (Būlaq, A.H. 1294), s.v. 'Al-dābba', i. 399.

§ Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London, 1871), i. 183.

|| Traditional sayings in Nawawi, *Kitāb al-Adhkār* (Cairo, A.H. 1312), 11–12.

¶ *Riḥ* xvi. 164; *ZDMG* li. 265.

** E. Doutté, *Magie et religion dans l'Afrique du Nord* (Algiers, 1909), 211.

†† Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durar al-hisān fi-l-ba'th wa-na'im al-jinān* (Cairo, A.H. 1324).

‡‡ In North Africa, A. Bel, *La Population musulmane de Tiemcen* (Paris, 1908), 23 (from the *Revue des études ethnographiques et sociologiques*).

i.e. 'something over which has been named (the name of Allah).'*

The *bismillāh*, by reason of its prophylactic virtues, is deemed specially serviceable as an inscription for amulets, and, in general, as an accessory of practical magic.† Copious illustrations of this are to be found in the *Shams al-ma'arif* of al-Būnī (†A.H. 622, A.D. 1225) and works of a similar nature. The Muslims also construct magic squares, and distribute the words of the *basmala* in magical combinations amongst the various compartments.‡ Al-Būnī is also the author of a monograph dealing specially with the use of the formula for magical purposes (*Fadd'ul al-basmala*).§

5. Calligraphic usage.—Mention ought finally to be made of a certain convention in the method of transcribing the *bismillāh*. When the Muslim calligraphist writes the formula for a ceremonial purpose, he imparts a peculiar form to its first word by way of signaling, as it were, the exceptional character of the phrase as a whole. The vertical stroke of the initial letter *bā* (ب) is considerably prolonged in an upward direction, and slightly curved; then, the 'alif (of 'ism) being omitted altogether,|| the *sin* (س) is placed immediately after the *bā*, while the final letter *mīm* (م) is connected with the *sin* by a line drawn far beyond the usual length (م————س).

The Muhammadan scribes would appear at a very early date to have introduced yet another alteration in the written form of the *bismillāh*—a peculiarity of common occurrence in MSS. Here the tips of the third letter *sin* (س) disappear entirely, as well as the 'alif, and the initial *bā* (ب) is joined to the final *mīm* (م) by a long horizontal line thus: م————ب. The antiquity of this usage

is indicated by an incident recorded in Ibn Sa'd, viz. that 'the Khalif 'Omar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz dismissed a certain scribe (*kātib*) from his office because he wrote *bism* without inserting the *sin* distinctly' (*walam yaq' al al-sin*).¶

LITERATURE.—The literature has been given in the footnotes.

I. GOLDZIEHER.

BLACKMAIL.—The word 'mail' is derived from the Norman-French *maille*, which is used in the Act of 1335, 9 Edward III. c. 3 in the sense of 'half-penny.' We find three meanings assigned to this term.

I. Legally, blackmail refers to rents reserved in labour, cattle, or produce. In mediæval times rent was uniformly paid in kind—a custom that persisted in France down to the days of the great French Revolution. The Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt gave a powerful impetus to the transformation of English agricultural life, and among the results was the substitution of payment in money for payment in kind. In Scotland and Ireland, and indeed in the rest of Europe, this substitution was not effected till a comparatively late date. For rent in kind were substituted 'white rents,' which were reserved in 'white money,' or silver. In the Middle Ages there was a great scarcity of the precious metals, and this doubtless assisted in prolonging the existence of the old method of payment. The discovery of silver in

* Lane, *op. cit.* i. 287; *Arabian Society in the Middle Ages* (London, 1883), 41.

† Reinaud, *Monumens musulmans du cabinet de M. le duc de Blacas* (Paris, 1828), li. 3–6.

‡ Doutté, *op. cit.* 212.

§ Brockelmann, *Gesch. d. arab. Literatur*, i. (Weimar, 1898) 497

|| This is a Massoretic practice.

¶ Ibn Sa'd, v. 270, 14.