

**Sema and not YHWH and its Brothers
in Samaritan Arabic Literature
(Nothing is Impossible, Live and Learn, the Longer You Live the more You See)
SUMMARY**

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The quotation "...but the Tetragrammaton, YHVH, is also in regular use. Samaritans, like Jews, avoid the use of images, but unlike Jews, they show less anxiety about using the divine name, and *a pronunciation (Yahveh) still survives*" (emphasis is mine) which appeared in the Encyclopedia of Religion in 1987, is the main reason for carrying out this study.

A preliminary attempt is made here in order to shed some light on the divine name, YHWH = Sema (the name), with the lengthening of the letter san for veneration and glorification, as reflected mainly in the Samaritan Arabic literature. Almost all this literature is still buried in manuscripts worldwide.

Sixteen manuscripts, the majority of which are from the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg, have served as the basis of this investigation. YHWH, the unpronounceable sacred name, is referred to usually by the expressions 'the greatest name, name of the highest' (al-ism al-a'zam) and sometimes by 'the noble name' (al-ism al-sarif) and 'the name' (al-ism). YHWH = Sema means eternity, relates only to God unlike other names and it is derived from **יְהוָה** (Exodus 15:3). This divine name is the premier of God's other names, which are 'curators'.

Various etymologies and interpretations of the written form YHWH, which is definite by itself, are collected and discussed. According to "Tradition" the qualities and secrets of YHWH are known only to the prophet Moses.

Two terms are central with regard to the subject in question. The first term is 'Ilm al-Mukasafa' dealing with the belief in the unity of God, de-anthropomorphism, and the awareness of God's characteristics. The second term, 'Ilm al-Mu'amala', discusses the rectification of morals, emendation of the powers of spirit and the repression of anger and lust.

The well-known Samaritan pronunciation of 'YHWH' as 'Sema' was attested in the fourth century by Marqeh b. Amram b. Serad. Some Rabbinic sources claim that Samaritans used to pronounce YHWH as it is without pointing at a specific period. However, it seems that Rabbinic Jews ceased using YHWH after the beginning of the fourth century B.C.

From the tenth-eleventh centuries onwards Jewish and Samaritan scholars have dealt with the pronunciation of Sema in various ways. Among these scholars are Abraham b. Ezra, Abu al-Hasan Ishaq b. Farag b. Maryt al-Danfi al Suri, Abu al-Fath b. Abi al-Hasan al-Samiri al-Danfi, Abu al-Farag b. Sadaqa, Kadr (Pinhas) b. Ishaq. Al-Qabbasi is the most detailed and some of his points are not found in other sources. Among these points are the quotation of a four-line poem in Arabic about the pronunciation of YHWH and the prohibition of uttering the common Arabic saying 'ya huwwa'.

The existence of various sects in the long history of the Samaritans ought also to be taken into consideration in analyzing the pronunciation of YHWH. Al-Dustan, for instance, adopted the pronunciation of ALHYM for YHWH whereas Dusis (Dosis) who called himself al-Mafish, changed the reading of the 'greatest name'. Some other issues related to the five principles of the Samaritan creed will be touched upon on the basis of Firkovich Samaritan manuscripts. The present writer is engaged since several years in preparing a catalogue of these manuscripts.

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