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**Nestorian Sources
of North-Arabian Traditions
on the Establishment and Persecution
of Christianity in Yemen**

North-Arabian historical sources contain some very interesting accounts of the beginnings of South-Arabian Christianity, the persecution of the founder and the dissensions arising after his death. Two of them, both transmitted by Ibn Hišām and at-Tabarī, deserve close attention, as they lead to unexpected results concerning their origin.

Wahb b. Munabbih's Version¹.

Once there was a man named Fīmyōn, of the remnant of the followers of 'Isā, the son of Maryam. He was honest, alert and remote from the affairs of this world. Observing God's laws he led the life of a pilgrim, passing from village to village. When he was recognized in one village as a Christian, he would go on to another, so as not to be discovered. He lived by the toil of his hands, being a bricklayer.

Once, as he was working in a Syrian village he was recognized by a man of that locality, Ṣāliḥ by name, who became fervently devoted to him and followed him wherever he went; but Fīmyōn knew nothing of this. One Sunday, Fīmyōn went out into the desert, as was his custom; Ṣāliḥ followed him, but

¹) Ibn Hišām, *Sīra* (ed. Cairo 1937) I, p. 30; Tabarī, *Ta'riḥ* I, pp. 920—925.

Fīmyōn was unaware of this. Ṣālīḥ sat within seeing distance, but hiding himself, as he did not wish to be discovered. Fīmyōn rose to pray. As he was praying, a dragon, a beast with seven heads, approached him. When Fīmyōn saw the dragon, he cursed it, and the dragon died. Ṣālīḥ too, had seen the dragon, and not knowing what had happened to it, was worried about Fīmyōn. Unable to control himself he cried: "Fīmyōn, the dragon is coming!" Fīmyōn paid no heed to him and continued his prayers until he had finished. Then he turned round and became aware that he had been recognized. Ṣālīḥ also knew that his place and purpose had been discovered. He said: "Fīmyōn, God knows how much I cherish you. I am eager to be with you always". Fīmyōn answered: "As you wish. You have seen my work; if you think you can do it, I agree".

(Here follows the story of how they travelled about the Arabian countryside and of the miracles performed by Fīmyōn, such as the resurrection of a dead child. Eventually, they were captured by an Arab caravan, which sold them as slaves in Naḡrān. Each was sold to different master. Fīmyōn's master discovered that his slave had supernatural powers, for when he was praying at night his room was bright, although he did not light a candle. He enquired his religion and the slave told him. The people of Naḡrān used to worship a palm-tree and every year celebrated a holiday in its honour, dressing it in beautiful clothes and adorning it with women's jewels).

Once Fīmyōn said to his master: "You adhere to the foolish cult of the palm-tree, which will never help you. If I curse it in the name of Him whom I worship, He will destroy it, as He is the only God — there is no other". His master said: "Do as you say, and if your words come true, we will embrace your religion and abandon ours". Fīmyōn rose, purified himself, recited two prayers kneeling and cursed the palm-tree. God sent a wind which uprooted the palm-tree and scattered its roots. The Naḡrānites embraced his religion, and he taught them the laws of the religion of 'Īsā, the son of Maryam. Later, there came to them the heresies that came to the adherents of their religion throughout the country. From then onwards, there were Christians at Naḡrān, in Arabia. This is the story of the Naḡrānites according to Wahb b. Munabbih.

The Version given by Muḥammad ben Ka'b, of the Ḳurayza tribe, and by a man (a Christian?) from Naḡrān²).

The Naḡrānites were heathen. In one of the villages near Naḡrān — Naḡrān was the largest and most centrally located town of the country — there lived a wizard who taught the youth of Naḡrān magic. When Fimyōn came there — they did not really call him as he is called by Wahb b. Munab. bih; they said: "As a man has come" — he pitched his tent between Naḡrān and the village inhabited by the wizard. Ṭamir sent his son 'Abdallāh to the wizard, together with the lads of Naḡrān. Passing by the tent, he was astonished to see the man praying and worshipping the Creator. 'Abdallāh used to sit with him and listen to him, until he recognized Allāh as the only God and worshipped him. He learnt the great name of Allāh which the saint had concealed from him. Returning to Naḡrān, 'Abdallāh used to ask every invalid: "Will you worship God and observe his religion? If you will, I will pray to God and he will heal you". The man would agree, recognize Allāh as the only God and become his worshipper. Then 'Abdallāh would pray for him and he would be healed. In the end, no invalid remained whom 'Abdallāh had not approached and persuaded to adopt his faith, and for whom he had not prayed and secured recovery.

This was reported to the King of Naḡrān, who called 'Abdallāh and said to him: "You have incited the people of Naḡrān against me, and abandoned my religion and the religion of my ancestors. I shall punish you exemplarily". 'Abdallāh replied: "You cannot do this". The King sent him to the summit of a high mountain, whence he was thrown down; but he was not hurt. Then the king sent him to the sea of Naḡrān: everyone who is thrown into it is drowned. 'Abdallāh was thrown in, but came out again unharmed. Having thus prevailed over the king, 'Abdallāh said: "By God, you cannot kill me, unless

²) Ibn Hišām, *op. c.*, p. 33 gives the following *isnād*: "Ibn Ishāk from Yazīd b. Ziyād, from Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Ḳurazī; and also Ibn Ishāk from a Naḡrānite from the *inhabitants of Naḡrān*". There is no doubt that these "inhabitants of Naḡrān" are Christians.

you believe in Allāh alone and profess what I profess. If you do so, you will gain mastery over me and be able to kill me. Following 'Abdallāh's example, the king recognized Allāh as the only God. Then he struck 'Abdallāh with a stick that was in his hand, caused a small wound in his head and thus killed him. The king himself died immediately afterwards.

The Naḡrānites professed 'Abdallāh's religion, as 'Īsā b. Maryam had taught it in the Inḡil and the Law. Later, there happened to them what happened to all their coreligionists with regard to the heresies. This is the origin of Christianity in Naḡrān, according to Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Ḳuraḏī and a man from the people of Naḡrān.

There is an interesting parallel between these stories and the Abyssinian tale summarized below³).

The story of the sufferings of the saint Azḳīr, head of the Naḡrānite Church, who first instructed the Naḡrānite Christians, and propagated Christianity in the reign of Šarābehal Danekef, King of Ḥimyar.

At first Azḳīr built a church and erected a cross. When this was reported to two high officials in Naḡrān, Du Ta'labān⁴)

³) H. Winkler, AOF I, pp. 330—335, gives an abridged translation according to the British Museum MSS.: 686, 687/8, 689; Conti Rossini has published the Abyssinian text from MS 689 and MS d'Abbadie 110 (Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Series V, vol. 19, pp. 729—738), and its translation (pp. 739—756). He added a short text from an Abyssinian synaxarion (pp. 747—750). Conti Rossini seems to have overlooked Winkler's publication, for as far as I can see, he does not mention it.

⁴) Conti Rossini (*op. c.*, pp. 721, 740) failed to recognize that Abyssinian Z Se'eban or Z Se'eleban corresponds to Arabian Dū Ta'labān. Dū Ta'labān, who fights Azḳīr, must undoubtedly be connected with Daus the Jew, mentioned by Hišām ibn al-Kalbī (Ṭabarī, *op. c.*, p. 926), and with the name Daus dū Ta'labān the Christian who brought the news of the Naḡrānite persecutions to the Byzantine Emperor (Ṭabarī, *op. c.*, p. 923). Arab historians are doubtful as to the name of the Christian refugee (see Ṭabarī, *loc. c.*, and Moberg, *The Book of the*

and Dū ẖaifān⁵⁾, they sent their men to destroy the church and smash the cross. Azķir was put in a dark prison. Some of the people of Nağrān, who had heard Azķir's sermons, assembled outside the prison, intending to force their way in, so that the saint might receive them into the Christian community. The sentries prevented them from entering, but a miracle happened: Azķir's prayers caused the prison gates to open, so that the faithful could come into the saint's presence.

When King Šarābehal heard of this, he became very angry. He ordered that the man who dared to introduce new beliefs had into his country be brought before him. ẖiryak, Azķir's friend, heard of the King's order and warned Azķir. But the latter, unperturbed, accepted his fate quietly. Even on his way to the capital he performed miracles. When he stood before the King, he began to debate with the Jews at court about the meaning of certain passages of the Bible. The King tried to induce him to renounce Jesus by offering him gold and silver, but all his attempts were in vain. Then one of the rabbis (*rabānūt*) advised the King not to argue with Azķir any longer. "It is no use arguing with him", he said, "since Christians are stubborn people. They even have a magic potion that confirms them in their stubbornness". His advice was to send back Azķir to Nağrān and put him to death there, as a warning example for the Christians. The King accepted the rabbi's suggestion.

Azķir was taken to Nağrān. There, new miracles occurred. Every attempt to torture Azķir failed. At first, he was tied to a stake, and a fire was lit under him; but the ropes singed through, and he descended from the stake unhurt, as the flames had no power over him. Then they tried to stone him to death. Among those was present a Jew with his wife and children. They had come in their best clothes to watch Azķir's execution, and they, too, threw stones at him. When a stone hit the saint, one

Himyarites, text, p. 6a). The confusion regarding the name, as well as the change of consonants (*d* and *t* do not occur in the Abyssinian alphabet), can be easily explained.

⁵⁾ On Z ẖefān = Dū ẖaifān see Conti Rossini, *op. c.*, p. 740 and Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Kitāb al-'Ibar* (ed. Cairo 1355 H.) I, p. 89.

of the children died in front of his father. As the father tried to approach and help him, his own body dissolved with leprosy. When the Jews saw this, they said: "Perhaps we should beat him to death with sticks". But one of them exclaimed: "How much longer are we to go on with this? Let us take a sharp sword and kill him with that". Among the spectators there was one who had a sword with him. He was one of those whom Azkır had baptized. The Jews asked him to lend them his sword, but the Christian refused. Azkır, wishing to put an end to his suffering, addressed the faithful one: "My son, do lend the sword, if you do not, you will have no part in me". The man lent his sword and the saint held out his head. Thus died the leader of the church⁷ Azkır and thirty-eight men with him, metropolitans, priests, monks and true believers⁸); and many miracles occurred at his grave⁷).

According to Winkler and Conti Rossini, this account is in agreement with historical facts. They regard the whole narration, excepting of course the miracles, as a historical record, proving that during Šarahbıl Yakuf's reign Judaism became the official religion and Christians were persecuted⁸).

This view cannot be endorsed unreservedly. Our story is no more credible than other stories from the same period, containing both factual and legendary elements. It seems to be a blending of the two Arabian legends given above, both rooted in Christian tradition, but distinct from each other.

It is interesting to note that the legend of Fımyōn knows nothing of a persecution of Christians⁹). One typical feature — the saint killing a seven-headed dragon by prayer — has its origin in Jewish talmudic sources:

⁶) According to Conti Rossini (*op. c.*, pp. 722, 746), this sentence is a later addition, as it conflicts with the rest of the story.

⁷) This, too, is regarded by Conti Rossini (*op. c.*, p. 745, n. 1) as a later addition, inspired by the story of 'Abdallāh's grave (see Tabarī, *op. c.*, p. 926).

⁸) Winkler, *op. c.*, p. 328; Conti Rossini, *op. c.*, p. 724 foll.

⁹) It should also be noted that Arabian historical sources alluding to the Nağrānite persecutions do not mention the Legend of Fımyōn, but content themselves with the Legend of 'Abdallāh.

"R. Aha bar Ya'aqov sent his son, R. Ya'aqov, to Abbayé. When he returned, his father, finding him not well-versed in the *halakha*, said: I can do better; you stay now and let me go. Abbayé heard that R. Aha was coming. Abbayé's schoolhouse was visited by a demon, who would play his harmful tricks even in the daytime and in the presence of two scholars. So Abbayé said to his pupils: Let no one invite R. Aha to his house, perhaps there will be a miracle. R. Aha arrived and stayed the night at the schoolhouse (since no one had invited him). The demon appeared to him in the shape of a seven-headed dragon. At every genuflection which R. Aha performed during his prayers, one of the dragon's heads fell off"¹⁰).

The relation between the stories of the three saints, Fīmyōn, 'Abdallāh, and Azkīr, remains to be clarified.

The Abyssinian story betrays familiarity with the stories of 'Abdallāh and Fīmyōn by a great likeness of both general lay out and detail: The attempts to kill Azkīr and 'Abdallāh are unsuccessful until a weapon owned by a true believer is used for the purpose; the faithful friends: Šālīh, the friend of Fīmyōn, and Kīryak, the friend of Azkīr; miracles occurring at Azkīr's grave, the miracle of 'Abdallāh's body in the days of 'Omar ben al-Ḥattāb¹¹).

But they do incorporate the miracle of the dragon related in the former: In the vicinity of Naḡrān there lived a big dragon, which was harmful to men. 'Abdallāh said: "I will find out which is pleasanter to Allāh; the witch or the monk. If the monk pleases Allāh more, I shall be able to kill the dragon; otherwise, the witch will have been proved right". 'Abdallāh killed the dragon and his belief in the monk increased. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (ed. Cairo 1929) XVIII, p. 130; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* (Bulak 1329 H.) XXX, p. 85; Ṭa'labī, *Kīṣaṣ* (ed. Cairo 1937), pp. 369 foll.; Kaẓwīnī, *Ātār* II, p. 83; Zamahṣarī (ed. Cairo 1925) II, p. 534 (to Sūra 85); see also Baiḍāwī (ed. Fleischer) II, p. 395.

¹⁰ Kid., 29b.

¹¹ J. Halévy, *JAs* 1872, p. 40, mentions that during his visit to Naḡrān, he was shown the Mosque of 'Abdallāh. For the story of 'Abdallāh's grave see also: Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* XVIII, p. 130; Tirmidī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (ed. Cairo 1934) XXX, p. 239; Ṭa'labī,

There is also a parallel to other stories: Daus Dū Ta'labān is the Christian fugitive from Naḡrān; according to Ibn al-Kalbī, Daus is the Jewish fugitive from Naḡrān who tells Dū Nu'ās of the Naḡrānite Christian's deeds; in the Abyssinian tale, Dū Ta'labān is one of the notables, apparently Jewish, fighting Azkīr¹²).

Conti Rossini thinks that the story of Azkīr was written towards the end of the 6th or at the beginning of the 7th C. E., in Syrian, the language of the South-Arabian church, and was afterwards translated in the North into Arabic, and finally, somewhere about the 14th or 15th C., into Abyssinian, perhaps in one of the Abyssinian monasteries of Jerusalem¹³).

Conti Rossini apparently assumes that the story is independent of the Arabian tales transmitted by Wahb and Muḥammad b. Ka'b. But its dependence on South-Arabian legends appears especially from the above mentioned similarity of details with the two Arabian versions. The author obviously could not rid himself of the influence of the Arabic version, in which the figure of the Naḡrānite King is very hazy. He received the story at a time when what we shall prove to have been its Nestorian origin was already forgotten. Conti Rossini's opinion that the king in the story of Azkīr is a heathen¹⁴) is untenable. If he is a heathen then why does he follow the advice of the rabbis and other Jews? The reader gains the impression that the king is a Jew or a Judaizer, even if this is not expressly stated. An Abyssinian

Kiṣaṣ, p. 370. Christian tradition, too, is concerned with the grave of the Naḡrānite Saint. Dū Nu'ās, on occupying the town, ordered that 'Abdallāh's remains be exhumed and burnt; Guidi, *La Lettera di Simeone*, p. 3; *De ss. Areta et Ruma, Acta Sanctorum*, Oct. X, p. 724, § 5; Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites*, p. 22a (see also *ibid.*, p. L). Legends of saints' graves were wide-spread in the East; comp. the interesting tale of Hana-nya's grave; Nöldeke, *Die von Guidi herausgegebene syr. Chronik*, p. 35, and Ta'labī, *Kiṣaṣ*, p. 287; also the tale of Daniel's grave, Hirschberg, *Bull. Jewish Palestine Explor. Soc.* XI (1944—45), № 3—4, p. 49.

¹²) See above p. 324, n. 4.

¹³) *Op. c.*, p. 725; also p. 717. Conti Rossini himself realized the doubtfulness of his theory, as the story is not transmitted in any of the languages mentioned by him.

¹⁴) *Op. c.*, p. 717.

synaxarion, apparently from the same period as the story of Azkīr, declares explicitly that the king of Yemen was a Jew (*Nagus Ayahude* = King of the Jews¹⁵). The story also embodies an early tradition preserved in other synaxaria. The name of King Šarahbil does not occur in North-Arabian literature. The author knew that no king resided at Naḡrān; this is why Azkīr is taken to the capital, Šefār (Zafār)¹⁶.

We have seen that the two Arabian versions do not mention Jews. It is uncertain whether this corresponds to the original form of the legends. In the following we shall prove that they were based on Christian — but not Monophysite — traditions, and it seems that originally there were few, if any, references to Jews. Muḥammad b. Ka'b and Wahb b. Munabbih, Moslems of Jewish descent, may have preferred the Nestorian stories of beginnings of Naḡrānite Christianity to the story of Ḥarīt, the Monophysite saint of Naḡrān. In view of the story of Azkīr, it does not seem impossible that they deliberately suppressed all allusions to Jews, so as to give the impression that the events took place under the reign of a heathen king. In this case, the Abyssinian source would have restored the original version of the legend.

These legends are not connected with the Christian legend of Ḥarīt, the Martyr and persecutions of Christians during Dū Nu'ās' reign¹⁷). They deal with the foundation of Naḡrānite Christianity, which in Ḥarīt's time had been in existence for

¹⁵) *Op. c.*, p. 748, line 26. Conti Rossini explains this by the influence of the story of Dū Nu'ās; this influence is noticeable in more than one detail.

¹⁶) The same observations apply to the legend of Ḥarīt, as transmitted in Abyssinian (see Pereira F. M. E., *Historia dos Martyres de Nagran*, Lisboa 1899). It generally agrees with *Acta*, but some particulars are based on Arabian tradition; e.g.: the story of the Jewish settlement in Yemen (*op. c.*, § 1; text, p. 80, translation, p. 125); the talking infant (§§ 21—24; text, pp. 101—106, translation, pp. 145—149); of course, the compiler has also used Abyssinian traditions. He gives the king his correct name: Kaleb. Incidentally, this detail is also found in the *Book of the Himyarites*.

¹⁷) Fell, ZDMG 35, p. 30, holds a contrary view, but is opposed by Conti Rossini, *op. c.*, p. 723, and Moberg, *Book*, p. LI.

many years. This was already perceived by Ṭabarī, who said: "There are some who say that among those whom Dū Nu'ās killed was 'Abdallāh b. at-Ṭāmir, their head and leader; but others maintain that 'Abdallāh was killed earlier, by a king who lived at that time. He was the founder of this religion, but Dū Nu'ās killed those of his followers who lived after him"¹⁸).

Doubts about the period when 'Abdallāh lived could easily arise. In the Arabian legend, as it is transmitted, even the slightest allusion to the time when its hero lived is lacking.

The importance of the story of Azkīr lies in the fact that it enables us to determine the time when Naḡrānite Christianity was founded, on the basis of an ancient, independent tradition. According to inscriptions, Šarahbil Yakuf reigned in Yemen in the second half of the 5th C.¹⁹

Guidi correctly observed, and confirmed by evidence, that Arabic sources generally depend on Syrian and Greek tales for some particulars, but admitted that they are mainly based on local, national Arabian traditions²⁰. According to Moberg, all

¹⁸) Ṭabarī, *op. c.*, pp. 924, 926.

¹⁹) See my book *Israel in Arabia* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1946, pp. 62 f., 83 f.

²⁰) The story of the Talking Infant, found in the Abyssinian version (see note 16), is unknown to the Greek or any other Christian version. We must therefore conclude that it is a later addition from Arabian sources, in which this tale is quite frequent; see *Kitāb at-Tiḡān* (ed. Hyderabad 1347 H.), p. 301; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* XVIII, p. 130, Tirmidī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* XII, p. 239; Ibn Kūtaiba, *Ma'arif* (ed. Wüstenfeld), p. 311, Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* XXX, pp. 84—85 (explanations 2 and 6). The story, Ṭa'labī, *Kiṣaṣ*, p. 370, reminds us of the story of Hanna and her seven sons (*Book of Maccabees* 2, 7). Ṭa'labī, *op. c.*, p. 101, below, and p. 158, mentions our Talking Infant among four babies similarly gifted. According to Muṭṭahar (*Le livre de la création et de l'histoire*, ed. Huart) III, p. 183, the fire was "coolness and peace for mother and child", comp. Hirschberg, *As-Samaw'al ibn 'Adiyā*, p. 64. Of course, accounts of ill-treatment of children by Dū Nu'ās are found in Christian sources, too; but there it is of a more serious nature and the description is quite different: According to Simeon (*Lettera*, pp. 12—13), the king took the four or five year old boy to his home to bring him up there; according to *Acta*, p. 738, he died with his mother in the fire, but in

Arabian tales dealing with ancient history are dependent on Christian sources, and only *The Book of the Himyarites* has preserved the original Yemenite tradition.

We do not share this view. Moslem authors may have taken some details, like the stories of the talking infant and the burnt Gospel from Christian sources, but precisely these details are lacking in the abundant Christian literature on Dū Nu'ās' persecutions.

The non-dependence of Arab stories on Monophysite sources is confirmed by the following important facts:

Moslem writers know nothing of the saint Ḥarīt, though he is the main figure in all Christian sources, except *The Book of the Himyarites*, and events in Naḡrān are associated with his name²¹). Religious reasons cannot have prompted them to suppress this episode. For one thing, these persecutions are mentioned in the famous 85th Sūra; the dispute on this subject is well known. And secondly, when relating the stories of Fīmyōn and 'Abdallāh, they might easily have added that of Ḥarīt. If, as Moberg maintains, those writers had been well acquainted with the *Acta*, they would not have entirely suppressed the figure of its hero.

The authors of both stories, that of Fīmyōn and that of 'Abdallāh, emphasize that their religion is the pure one, as yet uncorrupted by heretical innovations, which is one of the Nestorian contentions against the younger Mono-

Bibliotheca Orientalis (ed. Assemani) I, p. 390, we read that the boy, Baiṣar by name, afterwards lived in Constantinople at the Emperor's court.

²¹) *The Book of the Himyarites*, p. 8a, relates that the Jewish king Masrūk sent letters to the Naḡrānite nobleman Ḥarīt, ordering him to mobilize the Naḡrānites against the enemy. This Ḥarīt seems to be identical with Ḥarīt b. Ka'b, the Saint of the *Lettera* and *Acta*. The name is not usual in South-Arabian inscriptions, but occurs several times in the *Book of the Himyarites* (ch. 19, p. 24b), in the list of nobles who died as martyrs at Naḡrān; it was very common in North-Arabie, comp. Mordtmann-Mittwoch, *Himyarische Inschriften*, p. 38. Ḥarīt b. Ka'b was the name of a South-Arabian tribe in the neighbourhood of Naḡrān; according to Ibn Kūtaiba, *Ma'ārif*, p. 299, it included Jews among its members.

physite sect. This reveals the source of legends which are Christian in content, but unknown to Monophysite literature. They arose among the Nestorians, a large number of whom lived in South Arabia, especially at Naḡrān. It is uncertain which legends are older, the Nestorian or the Monophysite, but it is obvious that their view-points are antagonistic. The Nestorians claimed to have founded the true religion, subsequently polluted by heretics. The Monophysites held that the glory was theirs, as martyrs — both men and women — headed by Ḥārīt were members of their sect. But the Nestorians, too, had a martyr (ʿAbdallāh), who performed miracles and glorified the name of the Lord.

We now understand why the Nestorian legend is obscure, containing no allusion to the name or time of the persecuting king, etc. According to the Nestorians, the pure (= Nestorian) form of Christianity is very ancient in South-Arabia. Its beginnings date from the time when heathen kings reigned in Yemen²². And indeed, the Nestorians made numerous proselytes in distant borderlands.

These legends tally with the account of the Christianization of Naḡrān in the *History of the Nestorians*:

Chapter 79. The Story of the Christianization of the Naḡrānite People.

At the time of Yezdegerd there lived at Naḡrān, in Yemen, a famous merchant. His name was Hannān. He once went to Byzantium on business and subsequently returned to his own country. Later, he travelled to Persia. He passed through Ḥīra, where he met the Christians and became acquainted with the laws of their religion. He embraced Christianity and remained

²²) The Arian writer Philostorgius (early 5th C.) reports that in South-Arabia, in the 4th C., the Arian missionary Theophilus the Indian succeeded in suppressing the Jews and christianizing the local population (it was then that the Orthodox Christian of Alexandria sent Frumentius to Abyssinia). Nestorian sources put the christianization of Naḡrān at the beginning of the 5th C. According to Theodor Lector (an Orthodox writer!), the Yemenites adopted Christianity in the reign of the emperor Anasthasius (491—518). Theodor evidently means the Monophysite or Orthodox rite. See also Hirschberg, *Israel in Arabia* (in Hebrew), p. 67.

at Hira for some time. Afterwards he returned to his own country and appealed to his fellow citizens to adopt his newly-won faith; he baptized his relatives and many other people of the place and the surrounding region. He was joined by people who helped him to convert the inhabitants of Himyar and the districts near to Abyssinia. Later, a Jewish king, named Masrūk, ruled the country. His mother was a captive Jewess from Nisibis, bought by one of the kings of Himyar; she bore him, Masrūk, and brought him up in the Jewish faith. He succeeded to his father and killed a part of the Christians. Bar Sahde has already described this in his history²³).

It is obvious that Hannān was a Nestorian. He embraced Christianity not in Byzantium, but in the Nestorian stronghold Hira, the capital of the Lahmids, who were vassals of Persia. The author's insistence on the fact that only a part of the Christians were killed during Masrūk's reign is very significant.

The question why the Arabian stories do not mention Hārīt can now be solved. They are based on accounts by Nestorian writers, who were not interested in glorifying the Monophysite martyr Hārīt. A similar argument applies to the story of Dū Nu'ās:

Nöldeke points out that Moslem tradition openly favours Dū Nu'ās though he was a Jew, and in spite of the words of the Koran which might be construed as directed against him²⁴). This means that the Arab authors were not influenced by the Monophysites, whose writings are full of hostility and hatred towards the Jews, and warrants the assumption that they were influenced by the Nestorians, as these, unlike the Monophysites, who supported Byzantium and were supported by it, were a national

²³) *Patrologia Orientalis*, pp. 330 f. In *Israel in Arabia*, I have assumed that he is Yazdegerd II (438—457), which would suit the period mentioned in the Abyssinian source. There are some correspondences with the *Book of Himyarites*: the name of the Jewish King Masrūk; the mention of Hayyān or Hannān as the founder of Naḡrānite Christianity. On Bar-Sahde see Baumstark, *Gesch. d. syr. Literatur*, p. 134; Andrae, *Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum*, p. 7; Hira was a well-known centre of Nestorianism.

²⁴) *Geschichte der Perser und Araber*, pp. 174 f.

sect not particularly hostile to the Jews²⁵). This is confirmed by the objective account of Masrūk's persecutions in the *History of the Nestorians*.

Another proof: Monophysite authors know nothing of a pit in which Dū Nu'ās' victims were burnt²⁶). According to them, they were killed in a *wādī*. In the Arabic sources, the pit (*uḥdūd*) is the centre of the whole legend, as are Hārīt and his torture in the Monophysite sources²⁷).

We thus see that important traits occurring in one set of sources are lacking in the other, and vice versa. The overwhelming influence of the *Acta* on Arab historians, as alleged by Moberg (p. XLV), is therefore non-existent.

An analysis of the sources and the proofs adduced by us shows that Arab tradition has preserved many independent features lacking in Christian Monophysite literature. Inspiration of one

²⁵) There was bitter enmity between the Monophysites and the Nestorians. The Monophysite records of Dū Nu'ās' persecutions accuse their Christian enemies of treason and collaboration with Dū Nu'ās. They call them "Christians only in name" and claim that they incited the kings against the Monophysites. See Schröter, ZDMG 31 (1877), pp. 371, 377; *The Hymn of John Psaltes*, ed. Brooks, *Patr. Or.* VII, p. 613; Guidi, *Lettera*, p. 2; (also *op. c.*, p. 13, note 5); *Acta*, § 26, p. 742; Pereira, *Martyres de Nagran*, §§ 25—26, text, pp. 106—108, transl., pp. 148—152; Moberg, *Book of the Himyarites*, pp. 7a, 13a; comp. Andrae, *op. c.*, p. 11, n. 2. We have seen that according to the Nestorians, only a part of the Christians were persecuted.

²⁶) See *Lettera*, p. 11, line 17; Moberg, *op. c.*, pp. XXXI, XLVI, tried to find a hint of the pit in Christian literature. Incidentally, Ta'labī, *Kiṣaṣ*, p. 289, mentions a pit — *ḥandaḳ*, in which myriads of Jews were killed.

²⁷) As for the pit itself, the ancient Arabian legend of the fire in Yemen, which during the persecutions of As'ad Abū Karība, Ibn Ḥasan and Dū Nu'ās burnt the heretics and the heathen, while the rabbis were saved and even succeeded in putting it out, must be connected with it. Dīnawarī states expressly that Dū Nu'ās embraced Judaism, which proves that the Jewish scholars suppressed the fire. See Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Aḥbār* (ed. Guirgas), p. 62 foll. Muṭṭahar, *Le Livre de la création et de l'histoire*, ed. Huart, III, p. 180.

nation or religion by another is a common enough phenomenon, but the Arabs were not, as Moberg thinks, those who always received.

Ibn Ishāq, who transmits the main part of the story of the foundation and persecution of Yemenite Christianity, drew his material from three sources: 1° North-Arabian; the national tradition preserved in poetry and prose. 2° South-Arabian; Muḥammad ibn Ka'b al-Ḳuraḏī and Wahb b. Munabbih, who collected information systematically and professionally. 3° Christian; the oral tradition of Naḡrānites still living in the neighbourhood of that oasis and in Kūfa. Although the *isnād* mentions the Naḡrānites only in connection with the history of Christianity prior to Dū Nu'ās' war, it may be assumed that Ibn Ishāq, who lived in Medīna and afterwards in Baḡdād, collected information from all sides. We are also entitled to suppose that Hišām ibn al-Kalbī, a citizen of Kūfa, was careful to make enquiries among Naḡrānite exiles living at Kūfa.

It is no accident that these Naḡrānites were members of the Nestorian sect. We may suppose that after the expulsion of the Abyssinians from Yemen in the days of Saif Dū Yazan, the last of the Naḡrānite Monophysites, already diminished by the sanguinary war, left the city. Those who remained were Nestorians, who could plead that they had not been hostile to the native population.

Connected with the problem of Nestorian traditions is the question of the position of the *Book of the Himyarites* among the records of Dū Nu'ās' persecutions. Its editor, Moberg, pp. LXV, LXVII—LXVIII, thinks that it belongs to the same period as Simeon's *Lettera*. According to him, the author had been in Ḥira and collected his information of the Jewish persecutions there, while he had not written his book in Ḥira, and had obtained his information on the Abyssinian invasion and occupation of Yemen at his own place of residence, which was further away from the centre of operations.

This theory is unsatisfactory for the following reasons:

1° It is most peculiar that the author does not mention the

appearance of Dū Nu'ās' envoys at Hira or at al-Mundir's camp. The fact that he was no witness of these events did not relieve him of the duty of recording them. 2° Why does the author say nothing of the help which Monophysites in Hira and Syria began to organize for their brethren in Yemen, of the letter of Simeon, who after all was no private person but the Monophysite Bishop in Persia, of the letter of Abraham, the Byzantine emperor's delegate²⁸), or of the impression which the news made on Christians in Egypt and Monophysites in Syria? He is silent about Byzantium's intervention in the war. According to him (p. 6a), Umayya came to Kaleb, the Abyssinian King, and to Euprepios, the Abyssinian Bishop, and told them of the persecutions. Kaleb starts the war against the Himyarites on his own initiative. Nobody had approached him in the matter (as reported by ecclesiastical writers), and he, on his part, had not applied to the emperor (as reported by the Arabs). As far as can be ascertained from the remaining fragments, the author of the *Book* was not acquainted with the story of Hārit, the hero of Simeon and *Acta* (none of the persons of that name mentioned in the *Book* distinguished himself during the persecutions), though Hārit was well-known to the Syrian and Greek writers, but as we have seen, he was not known to the Arabs, either!

Can we imagine an historian who was in Hira at the time of these events and was much interested in them, as he planned to write a book on the subject, and whom all those details escaped or who refused to take note of them? And where did he find the name of Kaleb, the Abyssinian king, known only to the Abyssinian source, or of Masrūk, as he calls the Jewish king?²⁹

We believe that the author of the *Book* used some records written in Hira, while he himself was not there, but was far from the events both in place and in time.

²⁸) See *Acta*, §§ 27—28, p. 743.

²⁹) The name of Masrūk appears also in two Christian sources (*The Hymn of John Psaltes*, ed. Brooks, *Patr. Or.* VII, p. 613, and the *History of the Nestorians*, see above, p. 333, n. 23), which are outsiders in the literature on the persecutions; see also Hirschberg, *The Name of the Last Judaizing King in Himyar* (in Hebrew), Tarbiz XV (1944), p. 130 f.

According to Guidi's (*Lettera*, p. 32) filiation of the Christian sources, the *Lettera* and a second, lost pamphlet (Guidi suggests that its author was the Bishop Sergius of Rasafa, who, together with Abraham and Simeon, was at al-Mundir's camp) were the basis of the Syrian, Greek, Armenian, Abyssinian stories. Moberg identifies that supposedly lost pamphlet with the *Book of the Himyarites*. According to him, Sergius may have been the author of the *Book* (p. LXVII), and the *Book* and the *Lettera* are the sources of the *Acta* (pp. XLI, LXVI).

This thesis is quite unacceptable. In the Greek version we find names and events unknown to Simeon and the *Book*. According to *Acta*, the Naḡrānites were liberated and avenged thanks to the propaganda of the Monophysites in Asia and North-Africa and their pressure on Abyssinia whose king Ella Aṣbeḡa captured and killed Dū Nu'ās. Abraha is unknown to the *Lettera* and the *Book*. Moberg realizes these difficulties (p. XLI). He tries to solve them by assuming a third source used by the *Acta*. If we accept this solution, we must admit that the influence of this source was decisive as regards both facts and names. But in this case, the assumption that the *Book* is the principal source of *Acta*, is quite pointless.

It was likewise rash, on the strength of the occurrence of the name *Masrūk* in both the *History of the Nestorians* and the *Book*, to decide that the Nestorian writer had used the *Book*. Both drew from a common source: oral tradition. It is also obvious that John Psaltes had no elaborate account of the events before him. He was unacquainted with the *Lettera* and the *Book*, which is in my opinion younger than John's *Psalm*. Guidi³⁰), too, although relating John Psaltes to the *Lettera*, concedes that John had some other sources. Moberg (p. LXVII) is forced to assign a later date to the entire *Psalm* — not only to the title — to prove that John drew his information from the *Book*. But it is inconceivable that a Monophysite acquainted with the *Book's* statement on the number of victims should have toned it down and spoken of two hundred martyrs only.

³⁰) See *Lettera*, p. 32, n. 1.

These considerations induce us to accord the *Book*, with all the important information it contains, a special place in the literature on Naḡrān. In our opinion, it was written on the basis of oral accounts of Christians coming to Ḥīra, and especially of Nestorians expelled from Naḡrān in 'Omar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb's reign and settling in the new-founded "Naḡrān of Kūfa". The author had also seen written reports, and what is particularly important, collected information not only about Naḡrān, but about other places in Yemen (Ma'rib, Hadramaut and Haḡarēn) as well. But his work was totally unknown to the ecclesiastical, at least to those whose works have come down to us. There may be some connection between it and Hišām b. Muḡammad al-Kalbī's tale of the Naḡrānite who fled to the king of Abyssinia. But no definite conclusion can be drawn from this isolated point of resemblance. The *Book's* references to the establishment of Christianity in the days of Ḥabsā's grandfather Ḥayyān (or Ḥannān) and the Muslim tales of 'Abdallāh and Fimyōn may go back to a common source, but these references are too casual to allow a sound hypothesis. There is one negative feature common to the Arab sources and the *Book*: The martyr Ḥārīt b. Ka'b is unknown to either. The Arab writers suppressed this tale, as they knew that "Ḥārīt b. Ka'b" was the name not of an individual but of a South-Arabian tribe, and the Naḡrānites from whom the *Book* drew its information obviously knew this too.

By our investigations, we hope to have demonstrated that with regard to the establishment and persecution of Christianity in Yemen, Arab sources have preserved Nestorian traditions not contained in extant Nestorian documents.