

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE RISE AND SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN  
ARABIA IN THE FIRST SIX CENTURIES AD

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## A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE RISE AND SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN ARABIA IN THE FIRST SIX CENTURIES AD

Many in the Western church often assume Arabs throughout their history have either been aligned with Islam or connected to paganism. Granted, there is no denying the long and intertwining history Arabs have with Islam,<sup>1</sup> however, this connection only dates back to the mid-seventh century. After a close examination of Arab history prior to the advent of Islam, the reader will notice that Arabs actually have a rich history with Christianity. In fact, Christianity can be seen all throughout the Arabian Peninsula in the first six centuries AD.<sup>2</sup>

Before we begin tracing the rise of Christianity in Arabia let us first explain the scope of this article and its purposes. The first part of the article will cover the land of Arabia and the Arab peoples. The purpose of this first section is to provide the reader some basic historical background information regarding the land of Arabia and its people. This section will be concise and is really only here to note a few misconceptions one might have before embarking on this study. Next, the author will give the reader three passages from the New Testament that show how Christianity first reached the Arab

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<sup>1</sup> For a closer look concerning the relationship between Arabs and Islam turn to, Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Boulos A. Ayad, "The spread of Christianity before Islam in the Arabian peninsula with archaeological evidence from the province of Al-Hira," *Coptic Church Review* 12, no. 4 (December 1991): 116-20. Although the article is concise, it still highlights all the major areas of Arabia that were influenced by Christianity before Islam.

peoples near the Holy Land.<sup>3</sup>

The subsequent sections of the paper will be broken down by different regions of the Arabian Peninsula and will examine Christianity among the Arabs. The following regions that will be covered are: South Arabia, Syro-Arabia, Northwestern Arabia and Northeastern Arabia. Although various regions of the Middle East will be studied, we are primarily concerned with tracing Christianity in South Arabia.<sup>4</sup> The author will use the majority of the article to cover Christianity in this region. Finally, after we have examined the rise and spread of Christianity in Arabia, the author will give a brief summary and conclude with any final remarks.

The author would also like to make a few general comments on what this article will not cover. No attention will be given to Arab Christianity during the rise and spread of Islam.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the author will only focus on the spread of Christianity among Arabs in the first six centuries AD. Although the study of Christianity under

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<sup>3</sup> When referring to the “Holy Land” the author is referring to modern day Israel/Palestine.

<sup>4</sup> The author will closely be following the outline of J.S. Trimingham’s *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*. The author is indebted to Trimingham’s work. In addition, the author is also grateful for Irfan Shahid’s monumental books: *Rome and the Arabs: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1989; repr., Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006) and *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995). For most of the paper the author will be relying on Trimingham’s and Shahid’s works.

<sup>5</sup> For more information regarding the presence of Christianity in the Middle East after the rise of Islam, one should look to, Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine From Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc, 1995).

Islamic rule in the Middle East is fascinating and much needed, our concern for this study will strictly be Arab Christianity before Islamic rule.

Since this article is a historical survey the author will try to quote from the earliest sources possible regarding Christianity among the Arabs. Secondary sources will be consulted, but the author believes it is best to show the reader what the ecclesiastical historians stated concerning Arabs and Christianity. Ultimately by the end of the paper the reader will have substantial evidence detailing Arab involvement with Christianity prior to Islam.<sup>6</sup>

### **Arab Identity in the First Six Centuries AD**

Usually the first visual a modern Westerner receives when thinking of ancient Arabs is a people group that travels on camels and that are restricted to the south Arabian Peninsula. Early on in Trimingham's book he informs the reader that the above "conception" regarding Arabs is actually a false identity many have placed on this people group.<sup>7</sup> With regards to where the Arabs actually dwelt during the first six centuries AD, Trimingham states:

Arabs inhabited all the regions lying to the north of the Peninsula proper, Syria and Palestine, Mesopotamia and Babylonia, even parts of western Persia, intermingled with the Aramaic-speaking peoples of these regions.<sup>8</sup>

Trimingham notes that we should also be careful not to classify all pre-Islamic Arabs to a certain way of life. Since Arabs "embraced" multiple economic lifestyles

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the author will highlight key individuals, churches/monasteries and martyrs.

<sup>7</sup> Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

throughout many centuries it would be irresponsible for us to incorporate all pre-Islamic Arabs to a certain standard of living.<sup>9</sup> Trimmingham makes one more comment for those embarking on this study. He states scholars and students should not even categorize pre-Islamic Arabs to a certain dialect. Granted, Arabic was widely used among the Arabs, however, Aramaic was also a common language spoken by the Arab people in the first six centuries. Not to mention different forms and styles of Arabic were also common in the first six centuries throughout the Middle East. Therefore, to state that all Arabs used one standard language in the first six centuries is actually false.<sup>10</sup>

### **Arabs and the New Testament**

For many Christians living in the West, the idea of Jesus coming into contact with Arabs during his earthly ministry is mostly unheard of. However, the Gospel records, specifically the book of Mark, tell us that Jesus did in fact encounter Arabs. In a rather bold statement, Trimmingham concludes that “Jesus must have been in close contact

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Arabs throughout the first six centuries AD can be seen as: cultivators, peasants, townspeople and nomadic herdsmen. Furthermore, the notion that Arabs saw no great empires before the rise of Islam is a misconception. There were multiple pre-Islamic Arab kingdoms that grew to great prominence. For instance the Nabataeans, the Palmyrene, the Ghassanids and the Lakhmid are a few Arab civilizations that were influential before the time of Muhammad.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Even today the Arabic language differs greatly from one region to the next. Throughout the Middle East and North Africa one can find multiple dialects of the Arabic language. Although Modern Standard Arabic is used throughout the Arabic speaking world, each country has developed their own spoken form of Arabic.

with Arabs.”<sup>11</sup> Trimingham looks to Mark 3:7-8 as proof, which states:

Jesus withdrew to the sea with his disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him (NASB).<sup>12</sup>

Judging from what most Christian scholars would label as the earliest Gospel source, this passage in Mark is informing us that many people (specifically non-Jews, i.e. Arabs) were flocking to see Jesus. What concerns us the most are the regions described by the book of Mark. Two regions in these verses that were most certainly Arab populated were Idumaea and the Transjordan.<sup>13</sup> This is a noteworthy because it shows early in Jesus’ ministry Arabs were attracted to Jesus’ message and wanted to be followers of him. One can make the argument that Jesus’ primary concern was to the Jews, however, one can not overlook the time Jesus spent in Arab regions during his three years of ministry.

As for the apostle Paul, there is one passage from the Bible that clearly speaks about Paul’s involvement in Arabia and with its people. The passage is from Galatians 1:15-18 and reads:

But when God, who had sent me apart from my mother’s womb and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal His son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with you flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; *but I away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.* Then three years later I

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>12</sup> All Biblical references throughout the paper will be from the 1995 New American Standard Bible.

<sup>13</sup> Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 41. Trimingham states that other than Judea, these regions were predominately pagan. In other words, besides Judea, the rest of the regions were populated by non-Jews.

went up to Jerusalem to be acquainted Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days (emphasis added).

The second passage the author wants to bring to the reader's attention is Acts 2:9-11, which describes the Day of Pentecost:

Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, *Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God* (emphasis added)<sup>14</sup>

Judging from these two passages (Galatians 1:15-18 and Acts 2:9-11) it is clear Arabs certainly encountered some of the earliest forms of Christianity (from Paul's stay in Arabia). In addition, tribes from Arabia were some of the first to receive the Holy Spirit (Day of Pentecost). Although the above three examples are not an exhaustive list mentioning Arabs in the New Testament<sup>15</sup>, they are a start when researching the beginning of Christianity among Arabs.

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<sup>14</sup> In the context of the passage the author is describing the day of Pentecost, which was a day different nations/tribes came together to receive the Holy Spirit. Although the above two biblical references (Galatians 1:15-18; Acts 2:9-11) are not necessarily an indication of "church building" in the land of Arabia, they do however seem to indicate that the message of Jesus Christ did reach the Arabs early in the expansion of Christianity in the Middle East. For more information concerning Paul in Arabia one should turn to, C.W Briggs, "The Apostle Paul in Arabia," *The Biblical World* 41, no. 4 (April 1913). See also, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. "Paul in Arabia." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (October 1, 1993): 732-737. In addition, look to, Martin Hengel. "Paul in Arabia." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 47-66. Another resource the reader should turn to is, Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> For one desiring more research on this topic one should turn to, Tony Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadows of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003).

## South Arabia<sup>16</sup>

The first region we will cover is the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. Within this section we will examine evidence of Christian influence in the southern tip of Arabia. Predominantly we will focus on Christianity in Najran.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the author will offer a few general comments regarding the struggle to compile evidence of Christianity in South Arabia. Furthermore, this section will most likely be the longest section of the article mostly due to the evidence provided by Irfan Shahid and his work on the martyrs of Najran.

Naturally one would assume the majority of historical sources documenting the history of Christianity in South Arabia would come from “Muslim chroniclers and antiquarians writing in Arabic.”<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly this notion is true, but some scholars state the Muslim Arabic sources should be used with “extreme caution.”<sup>19</sup> One scholar in particular that holds to this opinion is Middle Eastern scholar Arthur Jeffrey. Jeffrey states that since the “discovery and interpretation of inscriptional material in the old South Arabian languages” has been found, scholars have determined that the Greek sources are more reliable than the Muslim Arabic sources. Nevertheless, Jeffrey does

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<sup>16</sup> The reader should look to the map provided by Trimmingham that shows a map of “South-West Arabia”. See Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 290.

<sup>17</sup> Najran is located in modern day Saudi Arabia and is at the southernmost tip of the country. Here is a map locating the city:  
<http://maps.google.com/maps?q=17.491667,44.132222&ie=UTF8&ll=17.476432,44.165039&spn=25.007984,53.569336&z=5>.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur Jeffrey, "Three documents on the history of Christianity in South Arabia," *Anglican Theological Review* 27, no. 3 (July 1945): 185.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

state that the Muslim Arabic sources do provide us with some factual information regarding Christianity in Southern Arabia.<sup>20</sup>

As for the Christian Arabic sources concerning Christianity in South Arabia, the material is not much more reliable than the Muslim Arabic sources, according to Jeffrey.<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey states since the Christian Arabic sources mostly regurgitate what was previously written in Greek or Syriac, most of the material ends up being “very meager”.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the few ecclesiastical historians that do mention strands of Christianity in South Arabia often do so sporadically.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, as one can notice, the task of detailing the spread of Christianity in South Arabia is rather difficult. The author believes it is worth quoting Jeffrey in full as he sums up the difficulty in compiling information concerning Christianity in South Arabia, he states:

Thus the task of writing the history of Christianity in South Arabia is that of weaving together a great number of strands gathered from one source or another, never quite certain that some strands are really going to hold, and very conscious that there are great gaps where we have no strands at all to help fill out the picture.<sup>24</sup>

The author has provided the above information simply for the fact that this survey of South Arabia will be exactly like Jeffrey’s description, bouncing from one source to the next. Likewise, most of the regions from hereon will be similar in nature, mostly due to the lack of credible sources. With that in mind, we will now proceed to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 185-6.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

view some historical references of Christianity in South Arabia.

Possibly one of the earliest accounts we have of Christianity spreading to South Arabia is from the church historian Eusebius. Although Eusebius wrote his account in the early fourth century, the event he describes dates back to the “middle of the second century.”<sup>25</sup> In the account, Eusebius describes a man called Pantaenus, who formally was a believer in Stoic philosophy. Eusebius goes on to state Pantaenus “abandoned” Stoic philosophy and became a Christian. The part of the account that concerns us the most is Eusebius’ description where Pantaenus went on his “missionary journey”.<sup>26</sup> The account states the following:

They say that he displayed such zeal for the divine Word, that he was appointed as a herald of the Gospel of Christ to the nations of the East, and was sent as far as India. For indeed there were still many evangelists of the Word who sought earnestly to use their inspired zeal, after the examples of the apostles, for the increase and building up of the Divine Word.<sup>27</sup>

One might look at the account and ask what the above description has to do with South Arabia? In Trimingham’s opinion, the reference to India “signifies South Arabia.”<sup>28</sup> Although Trimingham does not give an elaborate defense on how he came to this conclusion, nevertheless, he does state that within the context of the account one can make out Eusebius was referring to South Arabia. He goes on to state that when

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<sup>25</sup> Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 290.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>27</sup> Eusebius, *Church History of Eusebius*, Book V, Ch. X. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.x.xi.html>. (accessed April 15, 2010). For more information regarding Eusebius and Arabs turn to, Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs*, 95-112.

<sup>28</sup> Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 291.

Eusebius wrote the account India certainly referred to South Arabia because at the time the description was written South Arabia was known as the “gateway to India.”<sup>29</sup>

We can observe that Eusebius’ statement regarding Christianity spreading to South Arabia is rather vague (at least to the modern reader). However, due to the overwhelming evidence provided by Irfan Shahid, we have no doubt Christianity flourished in the southern region of Arabia, specifically Najran. As mentioned earlier, the city of Najran was located in southwestern Arabia and was “an important oasis and caravan city, and was converted in the fifth century.”<sup>30</sup> What concerns us the most are the events that occurred around 520 AD, which Shahid states are “the most significant series of events in the religious life of the Arabs before the rise of Islam”.<sup>31</sup> In the following pages the author will attempt to explain why Christians were martyred in Najran, as well provide further information regarding the influence Christianity had in this dominate Arab city.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. The author respects Trimingham’s monumental scholarship regarding pre-Islamic Christianity. But, in parts of *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* he makes some general statements with hardly any substantial evidence to back up his conclusions. Since Trimingham gives us no historical references of South Arabia referred to as the “gateway of India” we cannot give his conclusion much weight. This is why the author stated earlier that this was *possibly* the earliest account of Christianity we have in South Arabia. For a respectful review of Trimingham’s book turn to, Irfan Shahid, “Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times.” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 26, no. 1 (March 1, 1981): 150-153.

<sup>30</sup> Irfan Shahid, "The Martyrdom of Early Arab Christians: Sixth Century Najran," in *The First One Hundred Years: A Centennial Anthology Celebrating Antiochian Orthodoxy in North America*, ed. George S. Corey (Englewood, NJ: Antakya Press, 1995), 170.

<sup>31</sup> Irfan Shahid, "Arab Christianity Before the Rise of Islam," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, ed. Habib Badr (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches/Studies and Research Program, 2005), 446.

Before explaining why hundreds of Christians were killed in Najran, let us first clarify how Christianity first reached this city. The person credited to bringing Christianity to Najran is a man named Hannan or Hayyan. Hannan/Hayyan was a “Najrani merchant” who came across Nestorians<sup>32</sup> in Hira<sup>33</sup> during the reign of Yazdegerd I (399-420).<sup>34</sup> He was originally travelling to Persia, but since he converted while traveling the rest of his journey was cancelled.<sup>35</sup> After his return from Hira, he “converted his family and formed a house-church.”<sup>36</sup> Hannan/Hayyan would go on to be known as “the ‘apostle’ of Christianity in Najran and the region.”<sup>37</sup>

Through the help of Hannan/Hayyan, the city of Najran ultimately converted to Christianity in the fifth century. Christianity flourished in South Arabia and many Arab

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<sup>32</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Religion* states, “The Antiochene theologians (forerunners of Nestorianism) believed that Jesus Christ was the result of a union between the divine Son of God and the man Jesus. They explained this union by analogy with the Jewish prophets, outstanding men on whom the spirit of God descended, except that in the case of Christ, God indwelt as in a Son, and the union between God and the Son was inseparable and perfect.” One can find this reference at, Robert L. Wilken, “Nestorianism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 10, 6482.

<sup>33</sup> Hira is located in modern day Iraq.

<sup>34</sup> Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 294.

<sup>35</sup> Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 365-66 (page references are to the reprint edition).

<sup>36</sup> Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 294.

<sup>37</sup> Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 367. Much more could be written regarding Hannan/Hayyan and the spread of his Christian faith to Southern Arabia. However, due to limited space the author must move on. For further information regarding Hannan/Hayyan see, Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 360-72. Also, for those desiring to do further research on this topic one should look to two main documents that detail the spread of Christianity in Najran. The two documents are: *The Nestorian Chronicle* (also known as the *Chronicle of Seert*) and the *Book of the Himyarites*.

tribes were converted to the Christian faith. However, a problem arose around 520 AD when Yusuf, king of the Himyarites, wanted to convert the South Arabian region to Judaism, “including Christian Najran.”<sup>38</sup> Shahid goes on to describe king Yusuf’s following actions:

He therefore laid siege to it, and when the city opened its gates to him after a promise of no forced conversion, he faced its inhabitants with the two choices of conversion or death. Many of them chose the latter and were thus killed, including their *sayyid*, the chief of the city, al-Harith ibn-Ka’b, known to the Greek speaking world of Byzantium as Arethas, and also Ruhayma/Ruhm, the leading woman in Najran.<sup>39</sup>

The event that occurred in 520 AD ultimately ended as a massacre. Historical references tell us that “Some two hundred men and one hundred women of Najran died.”<sup>40</sup>

Soon after the martyrdoms occurred, news quickly “spread throughout the Christian Orient and in Byzantium.”<sup>41</sup> Once the news reached the Christian Ethiopian king Caleb (Ella-Asbeha), he immediately led a campaign in the South Arabian region to avenge the attacks on the Christian martyrs. Eventually the Ethiopians defeated Yusuf’s army and the threat of converting to Judaism vanished. After the defeat of the Himyarites, the South Arabian region, especially Najran, was known as a Christian country until the arrival of Islam.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Shahid, "The Martyrdom of Early Arab Christians: Sixth Century Najran," 170.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Shahid, "Arab Christianity Before the Rise of Islam," 446.

<sup>41</sup> Shahid, "The Martyrdom of Early Arab Christians: Sixth Century Najran," 170.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. See also, Irfan Shahid, "Arab Christian Pilgrimages in the Proto-Byzantine Period (V-VII Centuries)," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space In Late Antique*

After the martyrdom took place, the Christians in Najran quickly built a martyrion<sup>43</sup> in remembrance for all the lost saints. Shahid informs us that the name of the martyrion was Ka'bat Najran.<sup>44</sup> Once the martyrion was completed, Najran quickly turned into the most popular pilgrimage site in Arabia. Not only was the Najran martyrion popular among Christian Arabs, but many Himyarite and Abyssinian Christians traveled there as well.<sup>45</sup>

As for the structure of the martyrion, it cannot be overemphasized when examining the influence Christianity had in this region. The structure itself definitely bears witness to the strong presence of Christianity in South Arabia. Shahid provides a helpful summary describing the importance of this structure in relations to the Arabian south:

The martyrion in Najran must have been an impressive structure, built as it was in the Arabian South, a region known for monumental architecture, reflected in its castles and palaces. The Arabic sources have preserved some descriptions of this martyrion, which, in the opinion of the Abbasid scholar al-Jahiz, was one of the wonderful buildings with which the Arabs could be credited and which might be compared with those of the Persians.<sup>46</sup>

In sum, the martyrdom that took place in Najran was significant to say the least in respect to Arab Christianity. Before the events of 520 AD Arab Christianity was

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*Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1998). 384-5.

<sup>43</sup> A martyrion is a church with relics of martyrs or a building built over the grave of dead saints.

<sup>44</sup> Shahid, "Arab Christianity Before the Rise of Islam," 446.

<sup>45</sup> Shahid, "Arab Christian Pilgrimages in the Proto-Byzantine Period (V-VII Centuries)," 385.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 386. See also, Irfan Shahid, "Byzantium in South Arabia," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, no. 33 (January 1979): 70-4.

unknown to most in the organized Church. However, the horrific event that occurred in Najran ultimately “put the Arabs indelibly on the ecclesiastical map of the Universal Church.”<sup>47</sup> However, as important as this event may be, it has received little attention from the scholarly community.

According to Shahid, “The persecutions and the martyrdoms in South Arabia have been treated with relative isolation from historical events to which they are related.”<sup>48</sup> He goes on to state that because of this “isolation” the “South Arabian martyrdoms seem episodic, lying outside the main stream of Arabian and Near Eastern history.”<sup>49</sup> With the exception of Shahid and a few others, relatively no attention has been given to this topic. Therefore, the author hopes this brief section dedicated to Christianity in Najran has shed light on an area neglected by many historians.

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<sup>47</sup> Shahid, "The Martyrdom of Early Arab Christians: Sixth Century Najran," 184. For more information concerning Christianity in South Arabia prior to Islam turn to, Irfan Shahid, "Byzantium in South Arabia," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, no. 33 (January 1979): 23-94. See also, Thomas Wright, *Early Christianity in Arabia; A Historical Essay* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1855), 52-62, <http://ia600408.us.archive.org/35/items/earlychristianit00wrig/earlychristianit00wrig.pdf>. (accessed April 23, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Irfan Shahid, *The Martyrs of Najran: New Documents*. Subsidia hagiographica, no. 49 (Brussels: Societe Des Bollandistes, 1971), 11.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

### Syro-Arabia<sup>50</sup>

A major strand of Christianity that flourished in the Syro-Arabia region was Marcionism. Marcion (80-155 AD) taught that the Old Testament God was different than the God described in the New Testament. Marcion saw the Old Testament God as cruel and barbaric, whereas the New Testament God was full of love and compassion. His teachings didn't necessarily catch on with many in the early church, nevertheless, according to Trimingham, Marcionism was widely practiced throughout the Syro-Arabia region.<sup>51</sup>

Because Marcion was considered a "heretic" by many in the early church, those claiming to be "orthodox" set out to silent the "dissidents". The main opponent of Marcionism in the Syro-Arabia region was Antiochene Christianity. Although Antiochene Christianity slowly took over the Syro-Arabia region, one can still find pockets of Marcionism among the Arabs in northern Arabia in the early centuries after Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Although there isn't overwhelming evidence of Marcionism flourishing in the Syro-Arabia region in the first few centuries after Christ, Trimingham does offer us some

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<sup>50</sup> The author is indebted to Trimingham's work regarding this region. The author will mostly be highlighting some of the major points Trimingham points out in his chapter regarding the spread of Christianity in the Syro-Arab Region. For more information turn to, Trimingham, *Christianity among Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 41-85. Also, within this section the author will highlight major points Trimingham points out in his section titled, *Christianity Among the North-Western Bedouins*, 86-124. Both sections essentially document the spread of Christianity in the northwest Arabian region, covering Syria, Jordan and Palestine.

<sup>51</sup> Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 53.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

evidence that this movement (Marcionism) did in fact infiltrate the Arabs living in north Arabia. The first example of Marcionism among Arabs can be dated back to 318/19 AD.<sup>53</sup> This first piece of evidence is an inscription found in a Marcionite church, southeast of Damascus.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, this dedication is also the “earliest dated Christian inscription found in the Province of Arabia”.<sup>55</sup>

Besides the inscription, there are also a couple of early church historians/theologians who referred to Marcionism in the north Arabian region. Epiphanius (310-403 AD), writing around 370 AD, states that Marcionism was active in “Palestine, Arabia, and Syria in his time.”<sup>56</sup> In addition, Theodoret (393-457 AD) also claims that there were many Marcionite “communities” thriving in Mesopotamia in the mid-fifth century.<sup>57</sup>

Other than Marcionism, we also find the early church father Origen (185-254) interacting with Arab Christian tribes in the Syro-Arabia region. Origen’s first dealings with the Arabs were probably when he made his first visit to north Arabia earlier in his life. The influence Origen had among the bishops of Arabia become apparent through the works of Jerome (347-420 AD). In 231 AD Origen was condemned by Demetrius at the Council in Alexandria and essentially all the “European churches, including that of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Rome” stood by the decision.<sup>58</sup> However, in one of Jerome’s writings he informs us that the bishops of “Palestine, Arabia, Phenicia, and Achaia” all supported Origen.<sup>59</sup>

Origen’s second trip to Arabia was most likely to visit Beryllus,<sup>60</sup> who according to Eusebius was an Arab bishop stationed in Bostra.<sup>61</sup> Later in Eusebius’ account, he attempts to explain Origen’s connection to the Arab bishop Beryllus. Eusebius goes on to state that Origen was invited to speak to Beryllus regarding the nature of Christ.<sup>62</sup> Origen’s final trip to Arabia occurred during the end of Philip’s reign, which was roughly around 247-249 AD.<sup>63</sup> Eusebius also gives another lengthy description of Origen’s third visit to Arabia<sup>64</sup> and credits Philip the Arab (Marcus Julius Philippus) as the first Christian emperor.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>59</sup> Jerome, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, Letter XXXIII, To Paula, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.v.XXXIII.html>. (accessed April 20, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 57.

<sup>61</sup> Eusebius, *Church History of Eusebius*, Book VI, Ch. XX. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xi.xx.html>. (accessed April 15, 2010). Bostra or Bosra, is located at the southernmost tip in modern Syria.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Book VI, Ch. XXXIII. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xi.xxxiii.html>. (accessed April 15, 2010). The account is too long to replicate, therefore the author will provide an appendix at the end of the paper that will show quote the account in its entirety. Turn to Appendix 1.

<sup>63</sup> Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 57.

<sup>64</sup> Eusebius, *Church History of Eusebius*, Book VI, Ch. XXXVII. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xi.xxxvii.html>. (accessed April 15, 2010). Turn to Appendix 2. See also the end of Appendix 1.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Book VII, Ch. XXIV. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xi.xxxiv.html>. (accessed April 16, 2011). Turn to Appendix 3.

Some other notable historical individuals who comment on the spread of Christianity in north Arabia are Justin Martyr (103-165 AD) and the church historian Sozomen (400-450 AD). Martyr, who was born in Palestine, makes a vague comment regarding the spread of Christianity among the “tented herdsman”. Trimingham states that the “tented herdsman” Martyr is referring to “could only be Arabs”.<sup>66</sup> Here is the reference given by Martyr:

For there is not one single race of men, whether barbarians, or Greeks, or whatever they may be called, nomads, or vagrants, or herdsman living in tents, among whom prayers and giving of thanks are not offered through the name of the crucified Jesus.<sup>67</sup>

The above statement given by Martyr is vague in terms of proving the spread of Christianity among Arabs, even Trimingham admits this.<sup>68</sup> However, the writings of Sozomen<sup>69</sup> prove to be much more reliable in terms of documenting Christianity in north Arabia. One significant account described by Sozomen focuses around an Arab “sheikh”<sup>70</sup> called Zocomus. Sozomen informs us that Zocomus began to convert his tribe over to Christianity during the reign of Valens (364-78 AD).<sup>71</sup> A second important

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>67</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Typho, a Jew*, Ch. CXVII, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.iv.cxvii.html>. (accessed April 20, 2011).

<sup>68</sup> Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 94.

<sup>69</sup> The author would like to point out Sozomen was also born in Palestine.

<sup>70</sup> This word implies Zocomus was an elder of his tribe.

<sup>71</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, Ch. XXXVIII, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xi.xxxviii.html>. (accessed April 20, 2011). Turn to Appendix 4.

account given by Sozomen is his description of three monks living in northern Syria. The account goes on to describe how the monks spread Christianity among the pagans in the early fifth century.<sup>72</sup> Lastly, Sozomen also records the lives of different monks living in Palestine<sup>73</sup> and the Syria-Persian<sup>74</sup> region.<sup>75</sup>

So far we have seen the spread of Christianity in the Syro-Arabia region through the works of individuals, but there are also many important documents that originate from this region that prove Christianity was active in this area. One important document that seems to come from the Province of Arabia (present day Syria) is the *Didascalia of the Apostles*.<sup>76</sup> Scholars have determined the document dates back to the early third century AD and that it was originally written in Greek. The account itself “has been preserved in a Syriac version.”<sup>77</sup>

Inside the *Didascalia of the Apostles* it details the “life of Syrian Christians,” as well as explains the different ecclesiological aspects of the Syrian church. Furthermore, the document also hints that the congregations made use of other writings

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., VI, Ch. XXXIV, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xi.xxxiv.html>. (accessed April 20, 2011). Turn to Appendix 5.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., VI, Ch. XXXII, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xi.xxxii.html>. (accessed April 20, 2011).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., VI, Ch. XXXIII, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xi.xxxiii.html>. (accessed April 20, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> For more information regarding Sozomen and the Arabs turn to, Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth century*, 274-7.

<sup>76</sup> An online version of the document can be found here: <http://www.bombaxo.com/didascalia.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 68-9.

besides the four standard gospels. For example, the Gospel of Peter<sup>78</sup> seems to be an important writing for the Syrian Christians according to the *Didascalia*.<sup>79</sup>

### Northwestern Arabia

The strongest influence of Christianity we can find in the northwest Arabia region is through the Ghassanids in the sixth century AD.<sup>80</sup> In fact, Shahid claims this Arab clan “wrote the most important chapter in Arab Christianity in Bilad al-Sham<sup>81</sup> in this period.<sup>82</sup> Before settling in the northwest Arabian region, the Ghassanid tribe most likely originated from the Arab tribe Azd, located in modern Yemen.<sup>83</sup> We notice early in the second century AD<sup>84</sup> the Ghassanids moving out of Yemen and moving northwards, eventually finding their home in the “Greater Syrian” region.<sup>85</sup>

Regarding the year the Ghassanids eventually ended up in the northerwest Arabian region, Trimingham states that “Eventually, under a leader named ‘Amr ibn ‘Amir al-Muzaiqya, the clan moved through the Hijaz and Wadi Sirhan to arrive in the

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<sup>78</sup> One can view the online version of the Gospel of Peter here: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/gospelpeter-brown.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 69.

<sup>80</sup> The best map the author could find of the Ghassanid kingdom is here: <http://www.ghassanidkingdom.com/ghassan/>

<sup>81</sup> Bilad al-Sham in Arabic means “Greater Syria”.

<sup>82</sup> Shahid, "Arab Christianity Before the Rise of Islam," 437.

<sup>83</sup> Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 178. See also, Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 2.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Trimingham notes that it was probably around the year 100 AD when the Ghassanids began to travel north.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

west Syrian desert around AD 300.”<sup>86</sup> It is here in the Syrian desert we notice the Ghassanids, a former tribal clan from the south Arabian Peninsula, form a strong Arab empire and propagate some of the strongest hints of Christianity among pre-Islamic Arabs.

The Ghassanids became very influential in the Arab world beginning in the sixth century AD. One of the key characteristics of this ancient Arab dynasty was their tradition to build religious architecture. This tradition seems to have come from former Arab tribes that once inhabited the Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria) region, specifically the Tanukhids and the Salihids.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Shahid also attributes the massive building of monasteries and churches by the Ghassanids to the events that took place in Najran in 520 AD. Shahid goes on to explain how the connection is made between the two:

The zeal of the Ghassanids for building religious structures must have been enhanced by the extraordinary events that took place in the South Arabian city of Najran inhabited by the Arab group of Balharith. These were relatives whom they knew before they emigrated from South Arabia. When the martyrdoms of Najran took place in the 520s, many of the Najranites fled to the Ghassanids, as confirmed by the letter of Simeon of Beth-Arsham, written from the Ghassanid capital Jabiya, about these martyrdoms.<sup>88</sup>

In what Shahid labels the “most important and clear reference to Ghassanid

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 143. For a brief description of the Tanukhids and the Salihids and their relationship to Christianity turn to, Shahid, "Arab Christianity Before the Rise of Islam," 437. See also, Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, 418-35. In addition, turn to, Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 229-30; 242-71; 301-6.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. One should not take this observation lightly given that Shahid is the leading contemporary authority on the Najran martyrdom.

churches” are letters between Monophysites<sup>89</sup> and spiritual leaders of the Provincia of Arabia.<sup>90</sup> The letters were probably written around 560 AD and inside the letters it records where some of the monasteries are located in northern Arabia.<sup>91</sup> In addition, Jabiya, the capital of the Ghassanids, probably had many churches and monasteries. However, primary sources indicate only one or two churches were located in the city.<sup>92</sup> One solid piece of evidence that definitely proves there was a church in Jabiya is in a letter called *Peter of Callinicum*. This ancient letter was probably written around 587 AD and describes two Monophysite men (Peter of Callinicum and Damian of Alexandria) meeting at the church of St. Sergius, located in Jabiya.<sup>93</sup>

### Northeastern Arabia

One of the most fascinating cities in northeastern Arabia that present evidence of early Christianity is the city of Hira, which is located at the southern tip of modern Iraq.<sup>94</sup> Hira was the capital of the powerful Lakhmid dynasty that began in the late third

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<sup>89</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* states, “The Monophysites, in opposition to the conclusion of the Council of Chalcedon (451), view Christ as having one (*monos*) divine nature (*physis*) after the incarnation, not two. Arising in the fifth century as a movement against Chalcedon, the Monophysites became a potent force in Eastern theology and politics.” One can find this reference in, J. Rebecca Lyman, “Monophysites,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 3, 637.

<sup>90</sup> Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 148.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* For more information concerning the letters between the Monophysites and the monks of Arabia turn to, Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Vol. 1, Part 2, 821.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>94</sup> For a map of Hira turn to, Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in*

century. The Lakhmid kingdom was first established roughly around 270 AD by ‘Amr ibn ‘Adi<sup>95</sup> and the empire eventually faded away by 601 AD.<sup>96</sup> Although the kingdom was short-lived, the evidence of Christianity in its capital is overwhelming.

Similar to other Arab regions previously discussed, the Arab Christians in Hira were known for building churches and monasteries. In a brief article dedicated to Christianity in Hira, Boulos A. Ayad states, “Before Moslem authorities took over, most of the rulers of al-Hira were faithful to their new religion (Christianity) and began to build churches and monasteries in al-Hira.” Later in the same article Ayad lists several churches/monasteries located in Hira prior to the advent of Islam. Here is a brief summary of Ayad’s findings:

Among the churches of al-Hira were: one related to members of the tribe of Azd named the church of Beni Mazen; the church of Beni ‘Adi; the church of al-Baghwtah which was considered by the classical Arab writer al-Hamadani to be one of the seven centers for Arab worship; and the church of the monastery of al-Log which was related to al-Hira.<sup>97</sup>

A final piece of evidence worth mentioning is an inscription found in a monastery in Hira. The monastery dates back to around the mid-sixth century and was constructed by Hind, “the Christian queen of Hira.”<sup>98</sup> The inscription is first mentioned in

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*Pre-Islamic Times*, 174.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>96</sup> Ayad, "The spread of Christianity before Islam in the Arabian peninsula with archaeological evidence from the province of Al-Hira," 118.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. There are other churches/monasteries Ayad did not mention in this paragraph, but does so later in the article. To see the whole list turn to, Ayad, "The spread of Christianity before Islam in the Arabian peninsula with archaeological evidence from the province of Al-Hira," 118-9.

<sup>98</sup> Shahid, "Arab Christianity Before the Rise of Islam," 441. See also, Shahid,

the eight century by Arabian historian Hisham al-Kalbi (737-819) and later picked up by two Muslim geographers, Bakri (1014-1094) and Yaqut (1179-1229).<sup>99</sup> Given that Shahid calls it the “most important Christian Arab inscription of pre-Islamic times”<sup>100</sup> the author feels it is necessary to quote the inscription in its entirety. The inscription reads as follows:

This monastery was built by Hind bint al Hareth ibn ‘Amro ibn Hujr, the queen daughter of kings, and the mother of king ‘Amro ibn al Munther, handmaiden of Christ, and the mother of his slave, and the daughter of his slave, in the time of the king of kings, Khasru anu Sherwan, and in the time of bishop Aphraem- May the God to whom she built this house forgive her trespasses, and have mercy on her and her son, and accept them both and to give them strength to establish justice; and may God be with her and her son for ever and ever.<sup>101</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In this article the author has attempted to demonstrate the rise and spread of Arab Christianity in the first six centuries. We have seen Christianity first touch the Arabs early in the ministry of Jesus and Paul. Next, we discovered that Christianity in fact had a strong presence in the southern tip of Arabia. In addition, the author has shown northern Arabia was also flooded with Christianity prior to Islam. The author hopes by reading this article the reader has gained an appreciation for the intertwining history of

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*Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Vol. 1, Part 2, 696-7. Shahid dates the inscription around 554-569 AD.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Vol. 1, Part 2, 696.

<sup>101</sup> The translation of this inscription can be found at, Shahid, "Arab Christianity Before the Rise of Islam," 442. Also, on the same page Shahid has a reading of the inscription in Arabic.

Arabs and Christianity in the first six centuries AD.

**Appendix 1: Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 33.**  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xi.xxxiii.html>

1. Beryllus, whom we mentioned recently as bishop of Bostra in Arabia, turned aside from the ecclesiastical standard and attempted to introduce ideas foreign to the faith. He dared to assert that our Saviour and Lord did not pre-exist in a distinct form of being of his own but only that of the Father dwelling in him.
2. Many bishops carried on investigations and discussions with him on this matter, and Origen having been invited with the others, went down at first for a conference with him to ascertain his real opinion. But when he understood his views, and perceived that they were erroneous, having persuaded him by argument, and convinced him by demonstration, he brought him back to the true doctrine, and restored him to his former sound opinion.
3. There are still extant writings of Beryllus and of the synod held on his account, which contain the questions put to him by Origen, and the discussions which were carried on in his parish, as well as all the things done at that time.
4. The elder brethren among us have handed down many other facts respecting Origen which I think proper to omit, as not pertaining to this work. But whatever it has seemed necessary to record about him can be found in the Apology in his behalf written by us and Pamphilus, the holy martyr of our day. We prepared this carefully and did the work jointly on account of faultfinders.

**Appendix 2: Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 37.**  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xi.xxxvii.html>

About the same time others arose in Arabia, putting forward a doctrine foreign to the truth. They said that during the present time the human soul dies and perishes with the body, but that at the time of the resurrection they will be renewed together. And at that time also a synod of considerable size assembled, and Origen, being again invited thither, spoke publicly on the question with such effect that the opinions of those who had formerly fallen were changed.

**Appendix 3: Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 34.**  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xi.xxxiv.html>

Gordianus had been Roman emperor for six years when Philip, with his son Philip, succeeded him. It is reported that he, being a Christian, desired, on the day of the last paschal vigil, to share with the multitude in the prayers of the Church, but that he was not permitted to enter, by him who then presided, until he had made confession and had numbered himself among those who were reckoned as transgressors and who occupied the place of penance. For if he had not done this, he would never have been received by him, on account of the many crimes which he had committed. It is said that he obeyed readily, manifesting in his conduct a genuine and pious fear of God.

**Appendix 4: Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 38.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xi.xxxviii.html>

Some of the Saracens were converted to Christianity not long before the present reign. They shared in the faith of Christ by intercourse with the priests and monks who dwelt near them, and practiced philosophy in the neighboring deserts, and who were distinguished by the excellence of their life, and by their miraculous works. It is said that a whole tribe, and Zocomus, their chief, were converted to Christianity and baptized about this period, under the following circumstances: Zocomus was childless, and went to a certain monk of great celebrity to complain to him of this calamity; for among the Saracens, and I believe other barbarian nations, it was accounted of great importance to have children. The monk desired Zocomus to be of good cheer, engaged in prayer on his behalf, and sent him away with the promise that if he would believe in Christ, he would have a son. When this promise was confirmed by God, and when a son was born to him, Zocomus was initiated, and all his subjects with him. From that period this tribe was peculiarly fortunate, and became strong in point of number, and formidable to the Persians as well as to the other Saracens. Such are the details that I have been enabled to collect concerning the conversion of the Saracens and their first bishop.

**Appendix 5: Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 34.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xi.xxxiv.html>

Although Cœle-Syria and Upper Syria, with the exception of the city of Antioch, was slowly converted to Christianity, it was not lacking in ecclesiastical philosophers, whose conduct appeared the more heroic from their having to encounter the enmity and hatred of the inhabitants of the place. And they nobly refrained from resistance, or resorting to the law, but spiritedly endured the insults and blows inflicted by the pagans. Such, I found, was the course pursued by Valentian, who, according to some accounts, was born at Emesa, but according to others, at Arethusa. Another individual of the same name distinguished himself by similar conduct, as likewise Theodore. Both were from Titti, which is of the nome of the Apameans; not less distinguished were Marosas, a native of Nechilis, Bassus, Bassones, and Paul. This latter was from the village of Telmison. He rounded many communities in many places, and introduced the method essential to the knowledge of philosophy, and finally established the greatest and most distinguished community of monks in a place called Jugatum. Here, after a long and honorable life, he died, and was interred. Some of the monks who have practiced philosophy in a distinguished and divine way have survived to our own days; indeed, most of those to whom allusion has been made enjoyed a very long term of existence; and I am convinced that God added to the length of their days for the express purpose of furthering the interests of religion. They were instrumental in leading nearly the whole Syrian nation, and most of the Persians and Saracens, to the proper religion, and caused them to cease from paganism. After beginning the monastic philosophy there, they brought forward many like themselves.

## Additional Ancient References of Arabs and Christianity Prior to Islam

### **Appendix 6: Zachariah of Mitylene, *Syriac Chronicle* (1899). Book 8.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/zachariah08.htm>

Now for this reason four or five communities of hermits also settled in the desert: at Ramsho Mori, a chaste man and of honourable character; and at Natfo Sergius, a plain and simple man, and after him Antony, a mild and peaceful man, and that kindly old man Elijah, our countryman, and Simeon of Chalcis, and Sergius, who has now rebuilt Sodakthe (?), and the community on the Harmosho (?), the |211 monastery founded by my lord John at Haurō. And Simeon, archimandrite of the monastery of my lord Isaac at Gabbula, which is now polluted with the heresy of Julian the Phantasiast, was at that time zealous in the faith, he and those who were with him ; and Bar Hakino of the house of my lord Hanino, a worker of miracles, was similarly moved with zeal, insomuch as to go up to the royal city and in his own person admonish and reprove the king, although he was not received ; and this is witnessed by Akhs'noyo's epistle of thanks which he wrote to him from Gangra ; and similarly with the monks of the house of my lord Zakhkhai at Callinicus, and of the foundation of my lord Abbo, and of Beth R'kum.

And so the desert was at peace, and was abundantly supplied with a population of believers who lived in it, and fresh ones who were every day added to them and aided in swelling the numbers of their brethren, some from a desire to visit their brethren out of Christian love, and others again because they were being driven from country to country by the bishops in the cities

### **Appendix 7: Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VII, 19.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xii.xix.html>

They faithfully and justly assumed, that those who accorded in the essentials of worship ought not to separate from one another on account of customs. For exactly similar traditions on every point are to be found in all the churches, even though they hold the same opinions. There are, for instance, many cities in Scythia, and yet they all have but one bishop; whereas, in other nations a bishop serves as priest even over a village, as I have myself observed in Arabia, and in Cyprus, and among the Novatians and Montanists of Phrygia. Again, there are even now but seven deacons at Rome, answering precisely to the number ordained by the apostles, of whom Stephen was the first martyr; whereas, in other churches, the number of deacons is a matter of indifference.

### **Appendix 8: Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 27.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xi.xxvii.html>

What I have said may, I think, suffice to show the nature of the sentiments maintained by Apolinarius and Eunomius. If any one desire more detailed information, I can only refer him to the works on the subject written either by them or by others concerning these men. I do not profess easily to understand or to expound these matters, as it seems to me the fact that these dogmas did not prevail and make further advance is to be attributed, in

addition to the causes mentioned, especially to the monks of that period; for all those philosophers in Syria, Cappadocia, and the neighboring provinces, were sincerely attached to the Nicene faith. The eastern regions, however, from Cilicia to Phœnicia, were endangered by the heresy of Apolinarius. The heresy of Eunomius was spread from Cilicia and the mountains of Taurus as far as the Hellespont and Constantinople.

**Appendix 10: Egeria, *Egeria's Travel*, p. 37-8.**

<http://www.ccel.org/m/mcclure/etheria/etheria.htm>

It happened very pleasantly for us that we arrived on the day before the martyr's feast of saint Helpidius, which is on the twenty-third of April. On that day it was of obligation that all the monks from all parts and from all the borders of Mesopotamia should come down to Charrae, even the greater ones who dwelt in solitude, whom they call ascetics. For this day is observed with great dignity there on account of the memorial of holy Abraham, whose house stood where the church now is, in which the body of the holy martyr is laid. So it happened to us very pleasantly beyond our expectations that we should see these holy monks of Mesopotamia, truly men of God, as well as those whose good report and manner of life had reached men's ears far and wide, whom I thought that I could not by any means see, not because it was impossible for God to give me this, Who had deigned to give me all things, but because I had heard that they never come down from their dwellings except on Easter Day and on this day. For they are men who do many wonders, and, moreover, I did not know in what month was the day of the martyr's feast which I have mentioned; but at God's bidding it came about that I arrived on the day that I had not hoped for. We stayed there two days, for the memorial day and for the sake of seeing those holy men, who deigned to receive me very willingly for the sake of salutation, and to speak with me, of which I was not worthy. Nor were they seen there after the memorial day, for they sought the desert without delay in the night, each one returning to his own cell. In that city I found scarcely a single Christian excepting a few clergy and holy monks--if any such dwell in the city; all are heathen.

**Appendix 11: Philostorgius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Ch. 4.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/philostorgius.htm>

He says that Constantius sent ambassadors to those who were formerly called Sabaeans, but are now known as Homeritae, a tribe which is descended from Abraham by Keturah. As to the territory which they inhabit, he says that it is called by the Greeks "Arabia Magna" and "Arabia Felix," and that it extends into the most distant part of the ocean. Its metropolis, he says, is Saba, the city from which the queen of Sheba went forth to see Solomon. This tribe is part of the Israelitish family, and practises circumcision on the eighth day; but they also offer sacrifices to the sun and moon, and to the native gods of the country. Constantius accordingly sent an embassy to them, in order to induce them to come over to the true religion. The king determined, in pursuance of his plan, to conciliate the king of that people by magnificent presents and words of gentle persuasion, and thence to take an opportunity forthwith of sowing the seeds of religion. He also asked for licence to build churches on behalf of the Romans who came thither by sea, and the inhabitants of the country who wished to embrace true Christian faith. At the head of this

embassy was placed Theophilus the Indian, who had been sent when very young as a hostage from the Divaeans to the Romans when Constantine was at the head of the empire. The island called Divus, is a portion of their territory, and the inhabitants of it are called Indians. Further, he relates that this Theophilus, having passed a long life among the Romans, formed his character upon a pattern of the most strict amid perfect virtue, and embraced the true faith concerning God; but, he adds, that he chose the monastic life, and was promoted to the diaconate at the hands of Eusebius. Thus much as to his early life. But afterwards, having undertaken this embassy, he was invested, by the men of his own party, with the Episcopal dignity. But Constantius, wishing to array the embassy with peculiar splendour, put on board of their ships two hundred well-bred horses from Cappadocia, and sent with them many other gifts, with the double view of making an imposing show and of conciliating the feelings of the people. Accordingly, Theophilus, on his arrival among the Sabaeans, endeavoured to persuade the ruler of the tribe to become a Christian, and to give over the deceits of heathenism. Hereupon, the customary fraud and malice of the Jews was compelled to shrink into deep silence, as soon as ever Theophilus had once or twice proved by his wonderful miracles the truth of the Christian faith. The embassy turned out successfully; for the prince of the nation, by sincere conviction, came over to the true religion, and built three churches in the district, not, however, with the money which the emperor's ambassadors had brought with them, but out of sums which he voluntarily supplied out of his private resources, with a laudable strife to show that his own zeal was a match for the wonders performed by Theophilus. One of these churches he erected in a place called Tapharum, the metropolis of the nation: another in the place where the mart of Roman commerce stood, lying towards the outer sea. This place is called Adane; and it is the spot where everybody is in the habit of landing on coming out of the Roman territories. The third church he built in another part of the district, where the mart of Persian commerce stands, hard by the mouth of the Persian Sea, which lies along those parts.

**Appendix 12: Zachariah, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 8, Ch. V.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/zachariah08.htm>

And so the desert was at peace, and was abundantly supplied with a population of believers who lived in it, and fresh ones who were every day added to them and aided in swelling the numbers of their brethren, some from a desire to visit their brethren out of Christian love, and others again because they were being driven from country to country by the bishops in the cities. And there grew up, as it were, a commonwealth of illustrious and believing priests, and a tranquil brotherhood with them; and they were united in love and abounded in mutual affection, and they were beloved and acceptable in the sight of everyone; and nothing was lacking, for the honoured heads of the corporation, which is composed of all the members of the body, accompanied them, the pious John of Constantia, a religious and ascetic man, (he would not even partake of the desirable bread, "the foundation of the life of man," and so he progressed in the reading of the Scriptures and became a gnostic and a theoretic; for he used to raise his understanding upwards by the study of spiritual things for the space of three hours, marvelling and meditating on the wisdom of the works of God; and for three hours more, from the sixth to the ninth, he continued in joy and peace with every man, in intercourse with those

who came to him upon necessary business)—and Thomas of Dara again, while undergoing many labours, conversed much upon physics.

**Appendix 13: Jerome, *The Life of S. Hilarion*, 25.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.vi.ii.html>

Wishing to set the monks an example of humility and of zeal he was accustomed on fixed days before the vintage to visit their cells. When the brethren knew this they would all come together to meet him, and in company with their distinguished leader go the round of the monasteries, taking with them provisions, because sometimes as many as two thousand men were assembled. But, as time went on, all the settlements round gladly gave food to the neighbouring monks for the entertainment of the saints. Moreover, the care he took to prevent any brother however humble or poor being passed over is evidenced by the journey which he once took into the desert of Cades to visit one of his disciples. With a great company of monks he reached Elusa, as it happened on the day when the annual festival had brought all the people together to the temple of Venus. This, goddess is worshipped on account of Lucifer to whom the Saracen nation is devoted. The very town too is to a great extent semi-barbarous, owing to its situation. When therefore it was heard that Saint Hilarion was passing through (he had frequently healed many Saracens possessed by demons), they went to meet him in crowds with their wives and children, bending their heads and crying in the Syriac tongue *Barech*, that is, *Bless*. He received them with courtesy and humility, and prayed that they might worship God rather than stones; at the same time, weeping copiously, he looked up to heaven and promised that if they would believe in Christ he would visit them often. By the marvellous grace of God they did not suffer him to depart before he had drawn the outline of a church, and their priest with his garland upon his head had been signed with the sign of Christ.

**Appendix 14: Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 14.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.viii.xiv.html>

The same species of philosophy was about this time cultivated in Palestine, after being learned in Egypt, and Hilarion the divine then acquired great celebrity. He was a native of Thabatha, a village situated near the town of Gaza, towards the south, and hard by a torrent which falls into the sea, and received the same name as the village, from the people of that country. When he was studying grammar at Alexandria, he went out into the desert to see the monk Antony the Great, and in his company he learned to adopt a like philosophy. After spending a short time there, he returned to his own country, because he was not allowed to be as quiet as he wished, on account of the multitudes who flocked around Antony. On finding his parents dead, he distributed his patrimony among his brethren and the poor, and without reserving anything whatever for himself, he went to dwell in a desert situated near the sea, and about twenty stadia from his native village.

**Appendix 15: Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 32.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xi.xxxii.html>

Many monastical institutions flourished in Palestine. Many of those whom I enumerated under the reign of Constantius were still cultivating the science. They and their associates attained the summit of philosophical perfection, and added still greater reputation to their monasteries; and among them Hesycas, a companion of Hilarion, and Epiphanius, afterwards bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, deserve to be particularly noticed. Hesycas devoted himself to a life of philosophy in the same locality where his master had formerly resided; and Epiphanius fixed his abode near the village of Besauduc, which was his birthplace, in the government of Eleutheropolis. Having been instructed from his youth by the most celebrated ascetics, and having on this account passed the most of his time in Egypt, Epiphanius became most celebrated in Egypt and Palestine by his attainments in monastic philosophy, and was chosen by the inhabitants of Cyprus to act as bishop of the metropolis of their island. Hence he is, I think, the most revered man under the whole heaven, so to speak; for he fulfilled his priesthood in the concourse of a large city and in a seaport; and when he threw himself into civil affairs, he conducted them with so much virtue that he became known in a little while to all citizens and every variety of foreigner; to some, because they had seen the man himself, and had experience of his manner of living; and to others, who had learned it from these spectators. Before he went to Cyprus, he resided for some time, during the present reign, in Palestine.

**Appendix 16: Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, Book VIII, Ch. V.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05.iii.iii.vi.vi.html>

Monoïmus the Arabian was far removed from the glory of the high-sounding poet. (For Monoïmus) supposes that there is some such man as the poet (calls) Oceanus, expressing himself somehow thus:—

“Oceans, source of gods and source of men.”

Changing these (sentiments) into other words, Monoïmus says that man is the universe. Now the universe is the originating cause of all things, unbegotten, incorruptible, (and) eternal. And (he says) that the son of (the) man previously spoken of is begotten, and subject to passion, (and) that he is generated independently of time, (as well as) undesignedly, without being predestinated. For such, he says, is the power of that man. And he being thus constituted in power, (Monoïmus alleges) that the son was born quicker than thought and volition. And this, he says, is what has been spoken in the Scriptures, “He was, and was generated.” And the meaning of this is: Man was, and his son was generated; just as one may say, Fire was, and, independently of time, and undesignedly, and without being predestinated, light was generated simultaneously with the existence of the fire. And this man constitutes a single monad, which is uncompounded and indivisible, (and yet at the same time) compounded (and) divisible. (And this monad is) in all respects friendly (and) in all respects peaceful, in all respects quarrelsome (and) in all respects contentious with itself, dissimilar (and) similar. (This monad is likewise,) as it were, a certain musical harmony, which comprises all things in itself, as many as one may express and may omit when not considering; and it manifests all things, and generates all things. This (is) Mother, this (is) Father—two immortal

names. As an illustration, however, consider, he says, as a greatest image of the perfect man, the one jot—that one tittle. And this one tittle is an uncompounded, simple, and pure monad, which derives its composition from nothing at all. (And yet this tittle is likewise) compounded, multiform, branching into many sections, and consisting of many parts. That one indivisible tittle is, he says, one tittle of the (letter) iota, with many faces, and innumerable eyes, and countless names, and this (tittle) is an image of that perfect invisible man.

**Appendix 17: Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, Book X, Ch. 13.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05.iii.iii.viii.xiv.html>

But the followers of Monoïmus the Arabian assert that the originating principle of the universe is a primal man and son of man; and that, as Moses states, the things that have been produced were produced not by the primal man, but by the Son of that primal man, *yet* not by the entire *Son*, but by part of Him. And (Monoïmus asserts) that the Son of man is iota, which stands for ten, the principal number in which is (inherent) the subsistence of all number (in general, and) through which every number (in particular) consists, as well as the generation of the universe, fire, air, water, *and* earth. But inasmuch as this is one iota and one tittle, *and* what is perfect (emanates) from what is perfect, *or, in other words*, a tittle flows down from above, containing all things in itself; (therefore,) whatsoever things also the man possesses, the Father of the Son of man *possesses likewise*. Moses, therefore, says that the world was made in six days, that is, by six powers, out of which the world was made by the one tittle. For cubes, and octahedrons, and pyramids, and all figures similar to these, having equal superficies, out of which consist fire, air, water, *and* earth, have been produced from numbers comprehended in that simple tittle of the iota, which is Son of man. When, therefore, says (Monoïmus), Moses mentions the rod's being brandished for the purpose *of bringing* the plagues upon Egypt, he alludes allegorically to the (alterations of the) world of iota; nor did he frame more than ten plagues. If, however, says he, you wish to become acquainted with the universe, search within yourself who is it that says, "My soul, my flesh, *and* my mind," and who is it that appropriates each one thing unto himself, as another (would do) for himself. Understand that this is a perfect *one* arising from (one that is) perfect, and that he considers as his own all so-called nonentities and all entities. These, then, are the opinions of Monoïmus also.

**Appendix 18: John of Ephesus, *Lives of Eastern Saints* (Shahid states this reference is regarding Bishop Simeon's travel to the Monophysite world).**

<http://ia600406.us.archive.org/26/items/patrologiaorient17pariuoft/patrologiaorient17pariuoft.pdf>

The good and merciful God therefore, who does not fail to reward zeal for his name, on seeing the man's purpose of mind and his zeal, and that he underwent weariness no less than that of the apostles without shrinking, himself also bestowed upon him in no less degree than upon them his gift that was given to the apostles, of speaking with new tongues. For, whatever people's country he entered, on the third day that came he would speak with them in their own tongue, thanking God who had visited him. And so also he

even delivered an exposition in the chancel (in the churches of all the peoples to whom he went; and on this account he would declare and say to us with tears, In this matter I recognised clearly that God had visited me and strengthened me, and that he had not withheld his grace and his mercy from me. But he reflected, What parchments and what rolls are capable of going through all this wear of long and protracted journeys through the countries without being torn to pieces? And for this reason, and in order that the certainty of the writing might remain without suspicion of alteration, he made great linen cloths and medicated them, so that they might take writing, which also will, I think, be preserved by the believers in the land of the Persians for ever; and on them he would accordingly write the belief of every people in their own language from their archbishops, and above the belief he affixed the seals of the king of that people and of the bishops of the same - and of their chief men in lead upon these cloths, and thus confirmed it, acting thus among all peoples and all tongues among the believers 1 , going about and taking their belief and the seals of their soverans and of their highpriests. And thus he collected the belief of many peoples and of many tongues on these cloths. And he turned back after seven years and went away; and, while he was on his way back, the king in whose days he had started died, and the magnates who had been umpires, and his son succeeded him; and he proceeded to stir up war in the territories of the Romans', and his appearance before the authorities was not carried out. But it became known to all men living in the country of the Persians that the evil doctrine of Nestorius flourished there only, while all peoples and tongues abhorred it; and this glorious old man was yet more emboldened against them.

**Appendix 19: Jerome, *The Life of Malchus, the Captive Monk*, 4.**

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3006.htm>

On the road from Beroa to [Edessa](#) adjoining the high-way is a waste over which the Saracens roam to and fro without having any fixed abode. Through [fear](#) of them travellers in those parts assemble in numbers, so that by mutual assistance they may escape impending danger. There were in my company men, [women](#), old men, youths, children, altogether about seventy [persons](#). All of a sudden the Ishmaelites on horses and camels made an assault upon us, with their flowing hair bound with fillets, their bodies half-naked, with their broad military boots, their cloaks streaming behind them, and their quivers slung upon the shoulders. They carried their bows unstrung and brandished their long spears; for they had come not to fight, but to plunder. We were seized, dispersed, and carried in different directions.

**Appendix 20: Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 33.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xi.xxxiii.html>

Let us pass thence to Syria and Persia, the parts adjacent to Syria. We shall find that the monks of these countries emulated those of Egypt in the practice of philosophy. Battheus, Eusebius, Barges, Halas, Abbos, Lazarus, who attained the episcopal dignity, Abdaleus, Zeno, and Heliodorus, flourished in Nisibis, near the mountain called Sigoron. When they first entered upon the philosophic career, they were denominated shepherds, because they had no houses, ate neither bread nor meat, and drank no wine; but dwelt constantly on the

mountains, and passed their time in praising God by prayers and hymns, according to the law of the Church.

**Appendix 21: Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, V, 15.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.x.xv.html>

It appears that the Christians were subjected to similar injustice in other places; sometimes by the command of the emperor, and sometimes by the wrath and impetuosity of the populace. The blame of these transactions may be justly imputed to the ruler; for he did not bring under the force of law the transgressors of law, but out of his hatred to the Christian religion, he only visited the perpetrators of such deeds with verbal rebukes, while, by his actions, he urged them on in the same course. Hence although not absolutely persecuted by the emperor, the Christians were obliged to flee from city to city and village to village. My grandfather and many of my ancestors were compelled to flee in this manner. My grandfather was of pagan parentage; and, with his own family and that of Alaphion, had been the first to embrace Christianity in Bethelia, a populous town near Gaza, in which there are temples highly revered by the people of the country, on account of their antiquity and structural excellence. The most celebrated of these temples is the Pantheon, built on an artificial eminence commanding a view of the whole town. The conjecture is that the place received its name from the temple, that the original name given to this temple was in the Syriac language, and that this name was afterwards rendered into Greek and expressed by a word which signifies that the temple is the residence of all the gods.

It is said that the above-mentioned families were converted through the instrumentality of the monk Hilarion. Alaphion, it appears, was possessed of a devil; and neither the pagans nor the Jews could, by any incantations and enchantments, deliver him from this affliction; but Hilarion, by simply calling on the name of Christ, expelled the demon, and Alaphion, with his whole family, immediately embraced Christianity.

My grandfather was endowed with great natural ability, which he applied with success to the explanation of the Sacred Scriptures; he had made some attainments in general knowledge, and was not ignorant of arithmetic. He was much beloved by the Christians of Ascalon, of Gaza, and of the surrounding country; and was regarded as necessary to religion, on account of his gift in expounding the doubtful points of Scripture. No one can speak in adequate terms of the virtues of the other family. The first churches and monasteries erected in that country were founded by members of this family and supported by their power and beneficence towards strangers and the needy. Some good men belonging to this family have flourished even in our own days; and in my youth I saw some of them, but they were then very aged. I shall have occasion to say more concerning them in the course of my history.

**Appendix 22: Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book 2, 53.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iv.vi.ii.liii.html>

“But what is the consequence of this? Why, the barbarians themselves may boast now of

the contrast their conduct presents to these cruel deeds; for they received and kept in gentlest captivity those who then fled from amongst us, and secured to them not merely safety from danger, but also the free exercise of their holy religion. And now the Roman people bear that lasting stain which the Christians, at that time driven from the Roman world, and taking refuge with the barbarians, have branded on them.

**Appendix 23: Eusebius, *Martyrs of Palestine*, X, 2.**

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xiv.xi.html>

On the eleventh day of the month Audynæus, which is the third before the Ides of January, in the same city of Cæsarea, Peter an ascetic, also called Apselamus, from the village of Anea, on the borders of Eleutheropolis, like purest gold, gave noble proof by fire of his faith in the Christ of God. Though the judge and those around him besought him many times to have compassion on himself, and to spare his own youth and bloom, he disregarded them, preferring hope in the God of the universe to all things, even to life itself. A certain Asclepius, supposed to be a bishop of the sect of Marcion, possessed as he thought with zeal for religion, but “not according to knowledge,” ended his life on one and the same funeral pyre. These things took place in this manner.

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