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**THE HIMYARITE-ETHIOPIAN WAR¹
AND THE ETHIOPIAN OCCUPATION OF SOUTH ARABIA
IN THE ACTS OF GREGENTIUS (ca. 530 A.D.)²**

VASSILIOS CHRISTIDES *

1. Gregentius' acts content and nature:

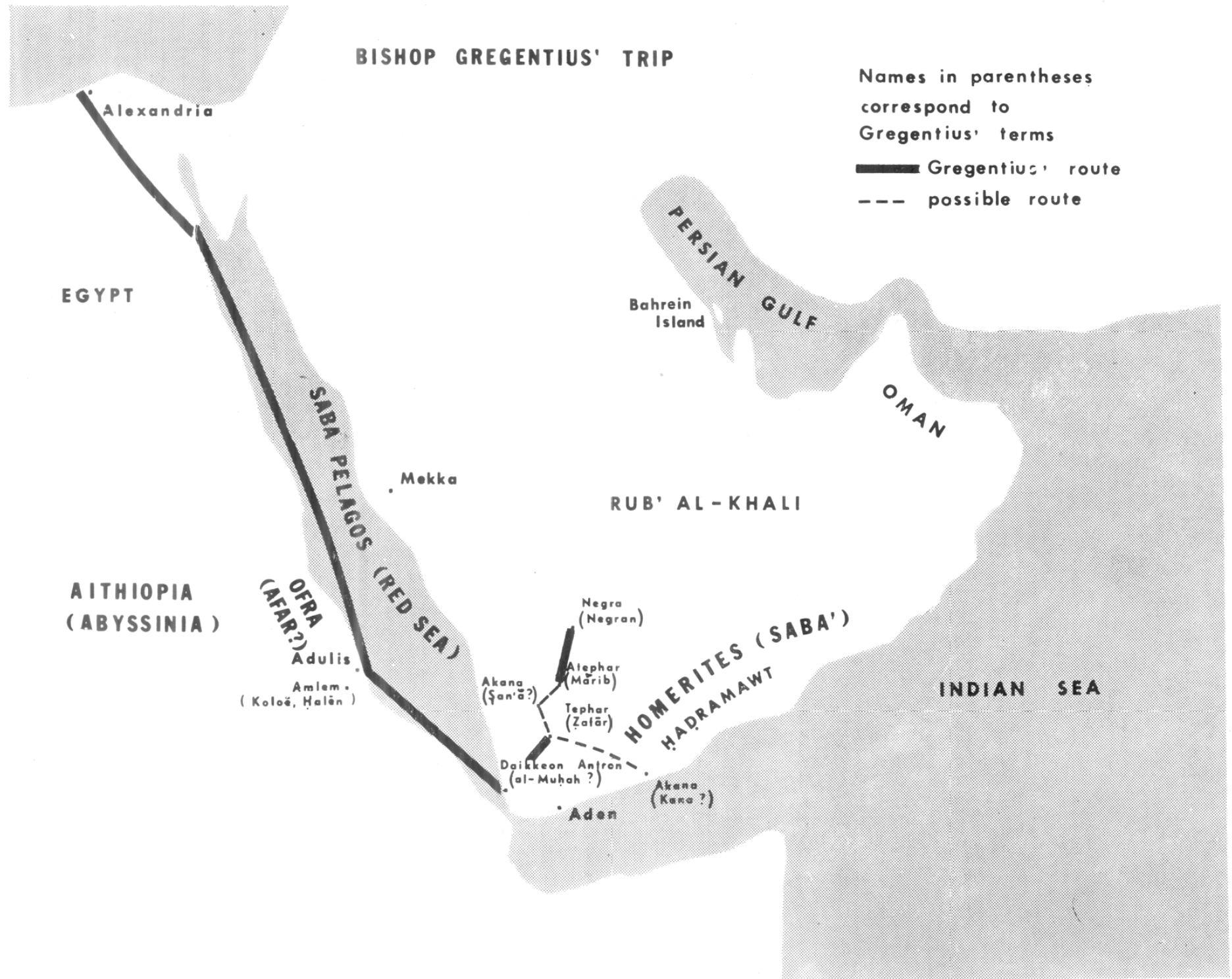
Information about South Arabia during the first half of the 6th century A.D. is scarce. One of the few literary sources which shed light on conditions existing in South Arabia in this period is the *Acts* of Gregentius. Traditionally the *Acts* has been thought to be composed of three parts:³ the *Life* of Gregentius, an account of Gregentius' early life, travels and tenure as archbishop of the Himyarites; Gregentius' *Dialogue with a Jew*, a discussion between a Christian (Gregentius) and a learned Jew (Herban), which focuses on the problems of dogma arising from various passages of the Bible; and the *Laws* of Gregentius, a text reputedly composed by Gregentius which deals with the Byzantine inspired laws applied to South Arabia by the Ethiopian controlled Himyarite Church.⁴ The present author has discovered a fourth and heretofore unknown portion of Gregentius' *Acts* in the Manuscript of Jerusalem entitled *Kata Azymōn* (unleavened bread). The *Kata Azymōn* manuscript is a polemic against the Jews⁵ as clearly indicated by the title and has been attributed to "Gregentius Bishop of South Arabia".

Gregentius, according to his *Life*, was sent by the patriarch of Alexandria to assume the post of archbishop of South Arabia with his seat at the capital Zafār ca. 525 A.D. Gregentius' appointment, suggested by the Byzantine Emperor Justin I, was made by the patriarch of Alexandria, and followed the overthrow and death of the Jewish Himyarite King, dhu-Nuwās (Masrūq) by the Negus of Ethiopia, 'Ella-'Aṣbeha (Kāl'eb), a Christian ally of the Byzantine, and the death of this Himyarite king. As a result of this change of leadership, Christianity, which had been nearly eradicated in South Arabia by Judaism, once again gained impetus.

The *Acts* of Gregentius relate events which occurred in South Arabia after the massacre of the Christians by the Jewish Himyarites in Negrand and form a chronological extension of the narration found in the *Martyrium* of Arethas, a work which described extensively the sack and fall of Negran (523/4 A.D.), and ends with the triumph and reestablishment of Christianity in South Arabia.⁶

* To my teachers, Prof. Francis Peters, Igor Sevčenko, and André Guillou, with gratitude.

BISHOP GREGENTIUS' TRIP



Both the *Martyrium* of Arethas and the *Acts* of Gregentius are hagiographical works which share the dominant purpose of edification. The *martyrium* of Arethas, in a rather subtle manner, and the *Acts* of Gregentius, in a bombastic style, preach the triumph of orthodox Christianity in South Arabia. This overwhelmingly orthodox attitude occurs despite the fact that the Negus of Ethiopia, 'Ella-'Aṣbeha, who reestablished Christianity in the country of the Himyarites, and probably the Archbishop Gregentius himself, were heretical monophysites. The importance of this religious misrepresentation — an inconsistency which had led some scholars to dismiss the *Acts* of Gregentius as unauthentic⁷ — should not be exaggerated but rather taken as a manifestation of the orthodoxy of the author. Neither the bias toward orthodox Christianity which the *Martyrium* of Arethas and the *Acts* of Gregentius display, nor the abundance of miracles which appear in the *Acts* of Gregentius should suggest a rejection *in toto* of the valuable historical information found in these works. Such distortions are not uncommon in other hagiographical writings which have preserved worthwhile historical data. Therefore, all possible inaccuracies contained in both hagiographical works should be investigated and compared with the other existing sources before any conclusions are reached. In addition, we should take into consideration that changes were instituted in the texts with the passing of time. Chronological distance and the rewriting of the texts by copyists who knew little, if anything, about Arabia took their toll in corrupting the contents. Thus, for example, Gregentius is called variously bishop of *Taphar* (= Ṣafār) in Arabia in the oldest manuscript⁸ of Sinai, bishop of Ethiopia in another⁹ and bishop of Libya in a third.¹⁰

In spite of all these shortcomings, exaggerations, spurious elements and miracles — the inevitable companions of hagiographical works — one can discern in the *Acts* of Gregentius, as will be shown, an author possessing first hand knowledge of 6th century South Arabia. Since no correct account of the history of this period is offered by any contemporary source, and, as Smith has pointed out, "The jigsaw puzzle of the material about the sixth century requires the method of the law courts,"¹¹ the *Acts* of Gregentius assume particular importance.

Because of the special difficulties arising from the nature of the *Acts* of Gregentius, the information they contain will always be compared and substantiated with relevant material found in other sources, particularly the Syriac *Book of the Himyarites*,¹² the Syriac *Letter of Symeon of Beth-Arsham*,¹³ the *Martyrium* of Arethas preserved in a Greek text¹⁴, the Ethiopic *Acts of Azkir*¹⁵, the Arab literary tradition and the Himyarite inscriptions. It is only by means of a thorough correlation of all similar episodes dealing with Arethas' martyrdom that a definitive opinion can be reached as to the veracity and historical validity of the treatment of the event given by Gregentius' *Acts*. This examination is followed by translations of some relevant passages of the *Acts* of Gregentius based on the most important manuscripts.

This article will form a stepping stone to a further investigation of the most valuable part of the *Acts* of Gregentius, a work which describes the unique system of laws supposedly applied by the Byzantine Archbishop Gregentius and by Abraha, King of the Himyarites, to South Arabia in accordance with its prevailing customs and institutions. If these *Laws*, dated one generation before the Prophet, should realistically reflect existing conditions of South Arabia, they would be of crucial importance for the study of the Himyarites in the 6th century. Moreover, this work would confirm the fact that the Byzantines contributed to the transforma-

tion of the pre-Islamic pagan civilization not only by the spread of their Christian religion, but by the introduction of certain of their institutions as well. Through an examination of these *Laws* a more penetrating insight into the transitional social institutions which preceded and contributed to the rise of Islam¹⁶ may be obtained.

2. Political and religious situation in South Arabia before the Massacre of Negran in the Acts of Gregentius and the Relevant Sources

A. Christians¹⁷:

The author of the *Acts* of Gregentius abruptly describes the siege and fall of Negran without any attempt to place the episode in its historical context. He does not preface the massacre with an account of the previous expedition of the Negus in South Arabia, nor does he clearly acknowledge the existence of pagan Himyarites and Christians outside the region of Negran. Despite this oversight, careful scrutiny of the entirety of the *Acts* and comparison with the other existing sources reveals, as will be shown, an author who was well aware of the religious situation in South Arabia.

Christians in the book of the Himyarites:

According to the explicit account found in the Syriac *Book of the Himyarites*, the Ethiopian Negus invaded South Arabia shortly before the Massacre of Negran (523/4 A.D.) and defeated the king of the Himyarites who was thus forced to seek refuge in the mountains of Yemen. The Negus, after building a church and establishing a strong Ethiopian garrison in Zafār, returned to Ethiopia. During the winter following the Negus' departure, the Himyarite king launched a retaliatory attack upon the Ethiopians, clergy and laymen alike, killed them and destroyed their newly built church in Zafār. The Himyarite king continued his rampage by turning his wrath against the Christians under his domain, slaughtering them.¹⁸ These Christians are identified as Ethiopians and others, obviously native Himyarites, with no reference to Byzantine Christians. It is only in the description of the Massacre of Negran that Byzantine Christian Martyrs are explicitly mentioned.

Martyrium of Arethas:

The above mentioned events are developed in a less clear historical sequence in the *Martyrium* of Arethas. In the beginning of this *Martyrium* all the Himyarites are pictured as either members of the Jewish religion or pagans and there is no explicit indication of the presence of Christians. Besides the ambiguity concerning the existence of Christian Himyarites, the history of the Ethiopian expedition is spotty. Without offering any details about the origin or initial stages of the Ethiopians' expedition to South Arabia, the *Martyrium* flatly states that the Himyarite king was defeated by the Negus and forced to retreat to the mountains of Yemen. According to the *Martyrium*, after the Negus' departure, the Himyarite king attacked and murdered the Christian Ethiopian soldiers and began his systematic persecution of all Christians in his domain.¹⁹ The whole Christian population was annihilated, but it is not clear whether these victims were native Himyarites. Again, as in the *Book of the Himyarites*, it is only in relation to the massacre of Negran that the author specifically says, "Christian Ethiopians and those Byzantine and Christian Persians who happened to be in this country".²⁰

Christians in the Acts of Gregentius:

The *Acts* of Gregentius vaguely present the existence of Christians in South Arabia before the expedition of the Negus. Despite the early silence about the presence of native Christians in South Arabia, when a later passage deals with the activities of the Negus and Bishop Gregentius, the author reports that they were engaged in the reorganization of the South Arab Christian clergy who had been annihilated in every town by the Jews.²¹ This statement therefore alludes indirectly to the previous existence of such clergymen and Christians in the cities of South Arabia, but with no clarification as to whether they were native Himyarites or Ethiopians who came with the invading Ethiopian Army of 'Ella 'Asbeha.

B. *Pagans²² and Jews²³:*

Neither the *Book of the Himyarites*, the *Martyrium* of Arethas, nor the *Acts* of Gregentius offer any explicit information concerning the pagans and Jews in South Arabia, their relations with each other and with the Christians. It is only through indirect references that we can glean information regarding the coexistence of pagans and Jews. It is known from the study of all available sources that in South Arabia during the early 6th century both Byzantium and Persia struggled to establish their political hegemony. In this contest, Christians and Jews took opposing sides: the Christians Himyarites allied themselves with the Byzantines and their Ethiopian supporters, while the Jewish and pagan Himyarites joined the Persians in forming a more nationalistic coalition. In the *Martyrium* of Arethas, as well as in the *Acts* of Gregentius, pagans are kept strictly in the background, and no real hostility on the part of the Jewish Himyarites against pagans is demonstrated. The letters which the Jewish king wrote after the Massacre of Negran show that he maintained friendly relations with the Persian leaders as well as with the pagan Arab king of al-Hīra. According to Gregentius' *Acts* and the *Martyrium* of Arethas, the arch-enemy of the Byzantines, the Persian King Kawad was the recipient of one such letter.²⁴ Another communique described in the *Martyrium* and the *Acts* was written to the Arab phylarch al-Mundhir III who was both a vassal king of the Persians and a notorious Christian-hating pagan, who was known to have offered human sacrifices to the goddess al-'Uzza. The *Martyrium* mentions al-Mundhir clearly by name while his identity is understood in the *Acts* of Gregentius in the statement, "he [dhu-Nuwās] wrote to all powers around him."²⁵

Little is said in the *Martyrium* of Arethas and even less in the *Acts* of Gregentius about the nature of paganism in South Arabia. While the Classical and Byzantine sources offer some data about the pre-Islamic pantheon and cult of the Northern Arabs, almost nothing is revealed about the state of paganism in South Arabia. The author of the *Martyrium* of Arethas correctly describes South Arab paganism as star-worshipping: the Sun and Moon, the deities *par excellence*, are the objects of sacrifice.²⁶ Beyond this information almost nothing else is reported. The native appellations of these deities are not given and, moreover, the planet Aphrodite-Venus (Athtar) which shared equal rank with the Sun and Moon is not mentioned.²⁷ The *Martyrium* of Arethas refers to the existence of statues of the deities and of "στῆλαι" probably stone altar steles.²⁸

In the *Acts* of Gregentius the existence of pagans in South Arabia is not reported at all in the narration of the Himyarite-Ethiopian war. The author concentrates his game narrowly on the two major powers in South Arabia, the righteous Christians of Negran and the perverse Jews. The presence of pagans and their temples is first broached in a later portion of the *Acts* of Gregentius in the course of the Ethiopian advance into South Arabia. Pagans in the *Acts* of Gregentius are viewed only in connection with the Jewish-Christian antagonism. They appear in the text when mention is made that all inhabitants, pagans and Jews alike, were forced by the Negus to embrace Christianity after the defeat of the Jewish Himyarite king. The pagans figure once again in the description of the Negus zealously razing the pagans' temples and destroying their idols during the Ethiopian occupation.²⁹

C. *Paganism in Christianity:*

The hagiographical sources demonstrate that certain aspects of paganism were not completely eradicated from a populace recently introduced to Christianity.

The *Martyrium* of Arethas preserves three examples of lingering paganism, heretofore unnoticed, the second of which appears also in the *Book of the Himyarites*.³⁰ According to the first example, the great zeal of Arethas' companions incited them to rush to his decapitated body and smear themselves with his blood.³¹ The *Martyrium* and the *Book of the Himyarites* also cite a second bizarre incident in which the pious mother of two daughters killed by King dhu-Nuwās, upon receiving their blood, tasted it and thanked God for providing her the opportunity to taste sacrificial blood.³² In spite of their Christian overtones, these rites are obviously pagan survivals of Semitic blood rituals.³³ The last instance which illustrates the superficiality of Christianity and the perseverance of pagan elements is found in the *Martyrium* of Arethas. Once again human sacrifice appears with Christian overtones: when the Jewish king was captured, the Ethiopian Negus set up an altar on which he sacrificed the king's blood in the name of Christ.³⁴

While the *Acts* of Gregentius do not include these pagan-inspired episodes, they present the newly converted Christians as retaining much of their former pagan attitude. The forced conversion of others at swordpoint demonstrates the shallowness of the Christians' own conversion. Characteristic of this attitude of thinking is the injunction issued jointly by Abraha, king of the Himyarites, and Archbishop Gregentius after the departure of the Ethiopians which declared that unless all the inhabitants abandoned their fals religion and accepted Christian baptism, they would be decapitated.³⁵ One further example of the mingling of paganism and Christianity in the *Acts* of Gregentius can be found in Archbishop Gregentius' suggestion to King Abraha: "After we try to persuade them [the Jews], if they still do not accept baptism, then proceed against them as your reign in Christ bids you to do (i.e. slay them)".³⁶

Careful scrutiny of passages concerning Christianity in the *Martyrium* of Arethas and the *Acts* of Gregentius thus produces the important observation that the Christian Ethiopians and the hastily Christianized Himyarites still preserved pagan elements in their newly acquired religion, specifically old pagan blood rites and the practice of forced conversion. Although the latter is not the monopoly of paganism, it appears here in a uniquely violent and anti-Christian form.

3. The Massacre of Negran (523/4 A.D.)

A. *Geographical Background*:³⁷

The *Acts* of Gregentius, unlike the *Martyrium* of Arethas, do not provide any description of the geographical position occupied by the Himyarites. But while the *Acts* of Gregentius do not specify the location of the Himyarites, they escape the error committed by those Byzantine authors who confuse the land of Ethiopia with that of South Arabia. The *Acts* of Gregentius clearly distinguish Ethiopia and the Ethiopians from South Arabia and its inhabitants.

Although the *Acts* of Gregentius do not directly present the geographical situation of the land of the Himyarites, some geographical information intrudes in the course of Archbishop Gregentius' journey to South Arabia and in the description of the program of church building after the defeat of the Himyarite Jewish king.

The Himyarite land called in the *Martyrium* of Arethas *Saba* or *ho Homeritēs*,³⁸ is termed in the *Acts* of Gregentius *ho Homeritēs* and its inhabitants *homeritai*.³⁹ The form *homeritai* offers a convenient Greek transliteration for the Arabic *himyar* formed under the influence of the name of the poet Homer,⁴⁰ and appears not only in the literary sources of this period but in various earlier works, i.e. in the 4th century A.D. *Life* of Symeon the Stylite,⁴¹ and in the Byzantine geographies.⁴²

Gregentius and his entourage travelled from Alexandria to South Arabia by way of Ethiopia, stopping in the capital of Ethiopia in order to assemble provisions for the rest of their trip.⁴³ It is noteworthy that this route was the customary itinerary followed by the Byzantine officials on their way to South Arabia. In the *Codex Theodosianus* we find the clear dictum that those who voyage to South Arabia should stop in Ethiopia for no more than six months to collect their provisions.⁴⁴ The capital of Ethiopia appears with the enigmatic name *Amlem*, a name which has puzzled students of the *Acts* of Gregentius and has led some to reject their authenticity altogether.⁴⁵ Most probably this name is simply the Greek transliteration of the Ethiopian name *Halēn* found in the Axoum inscriptions. Prideaux has identified this *Halēn* with the town *Koloē* (now *Halai*)⁴⁶ mentioned by the *Periplus of the Outer Sea* as situated at a distance of three days' journey from Adulis⁴⁷ and providing the market place for ivory. Koloē at this period seems to have been the main settlement, and Adulis, because of its hot climate, merely a sparsely populated trading-post.⁴⁸

After his stopover in Ethiopia, Gregentius crossed the lowest part of the Arabian Gulf, usually called the Red Sea in the Greek sources and here given the name "the rough sea of Saba."⁴⁹ At which port of South Arabia Gregentius docked is open to question. The most probable place would have been al-Muhah, the port for the inland capital of Zafār, where, according to the inscriptions, the Ethiopians constructed a church which was subsequently destroyed by the Jewish Himyarite King dhu-Nuwās.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, none of the literary sources mentions this port in the description of the campaign of the Jewish Himyarite king. Gregentius' *Acts* mention *Daikkeon Antron*⁵¹ as the landing place of the bishop in South Arabia, a location as mysterious as a certain *Boulikas* cited by Procopius as the Southern Arab counterpart of the Ethiopian port of Adulis.⁵¹ It may be that *Daikkeon Antron* and *Boulikas* are coterminous.⁵³ After docking at the port, Gregentius

proceeded to the capital of the land of the Himyarites. The capital *Zafār* is transliterated as *Τε(α)φάρ* in most of the manuscripts⁵⁴ although we also find the form *Τάφοραι*⁵⁵ and even *Φαρή*⁵⁶.

Additional geographical information is found in the description of the towns in which churches were constructed. The *Acts* mention many churches built by Abraha and consecrated by Archbishop Gregentius. Three such churches were constructed in Negran, one of which was named after the martyr Arethas, and another three were built in the capital *Zafār*. Towns in which other churches were situated include a certain *Legmia*, a town difficult to identify, and *Atafar*, which could be either a duplication of the capital city *Zafār* with the addition of the article (al-*Zafār*) az-zafar) *Atafar*) or the name of another city. *Zafār* meant capital and could be the capital of another province or perhaps the old capital of South Arabia, Marib, where according to the inscriptions⁵⁷ Abraha built a church. Churches were also built in a town called *Akana*. The latter site is perhaps Kana, a coastal town in Ḥaḍramawt where inscriptions indicate churches existed.⁵⁸ More probably, since *Akana* appears as adjacent to *Zafār*, it should be identified with the town *Ṣanā* — the article “al” (“as” after the assimilation) plus the name, as-Sana becoming *Akana*. In addition to the Himyarite inscriptions, the Arab sources mention the presence of a magnificent church in *Ṣanā*.⁵⁹

A few words should be said about another enigmatic toponym which appears in the *Acts* of Gregentius, i.e., the term *Threlleton*.⁶⁰ According to the *Acts* of Gregentius, the heads of the Jewish community under their leader Herban were invited to King Abraha's palace to discuss with Archbishop Gregentius the truths of Christianity. Also present at this meeting were the highest ecclesiastical and secular authorities. This public dialogue took place in a hall — the best of the palace — called *Threlleton*, a name which again brought accusations of false name-droppings against the author of the *Acts* of Gregentius. *Threlleton* actually is a variation of the word *troullōtos* meaning *domed* and derived from the word *troullōs* (Lat. *trulla*) = dome or cupola.⁶¹ It is for this reason that we find the reading *tholōtos* = vaulted in the Codex Vindobon. of the *Acts*.⁶² Thus *Threlleton* simply means the Domed Hall or Courtyard.⁶³

B. *Main Protagonists — Chronology:*

The *Acts* of Gregentius do not offer a precise chronology of the events of the Ethiopian Himyarite struggle prior to the Massacre of Negran. The events taking place before the Massacre (523/5 A.D.) are of incidental interest and are included by the author of the *Acts* of Gregentius merely as a preface to a more detailed account of Gregentius' activities in South Arabia. But the author of the *Acts* attempts to place carefully the events which transpired during Gregentius' stay in South Arabia and the dating roughly corresponds to the information found in the relevant sources. The only chronology of the Massacre of Negran in the *Acts* is the simple statement that the events occurred while Proterius held the seat of the patriarch of Alexandria, and while the Byzantine Emperor Justin (517-525 A.D.), *Elesboam* ('Ella-Aṣbeha ca. 514-542 A.D.) the king of Ethiopians and *Dounaa* (Yūsuf dhu-Nuwās ca. 535 A.D.) king of the Homeritai ruled.⁶³

Elesboam ('Ella-Aṣbeha):

Elesboam is the Graecized form of the Ethiopian name for the Negus Ella-Aṣbeha. The ending of the name Elesboam is formed according to the same pattern of Greek transliteration of Biblical names as appears in the Septuagint, i.e. Abraham. In the *Martyrium of Arethas* we find a variation of this name, the declinable form *Elesbas*.⁶⁴ The only other (appearance of the) non-declinable Greek form of 'Ella 'Abreha is found on Ethiopian coins where the form *Esbāḗl*, formed according to the Biblical ending *el* as in *Ishmael* — is found.⁶⁵ None of the Byzantine sources mention the appellation *Kāleb* by which 'Ella-Aṣbeha is also known in other sources and which is the only name given to him in the *Syriac Book of the Himyarites*. Moberg, in his effort to emphasize the dependence of the *Martyrium of Arethas* on the *Book of the Himyarites*, tries to explain the form *Elesbas* of the *Martyrium* as derived from Byzantine literary sources. Thus, from Cosmas Ἑλλατβάας Malalas formed Ἑλεσβόας and Procopius Ἑλλήσθεκτος.⁶⁶ Nevertheless Moberg admits that there is no conclusive evidence which would suggest definite literary interrelation among the Byzantine sources. The various forms of the name of the Negus should be considered not as simple modifications of a literary tradition, all derived from one author, but instead as representing different independent sources. Thus, Cosmas, an educated man who used first hand information for his *Christian Topography*, presents the best transliteration of the first part of the Negus' name, i.e., *Ella*. In Procopius, we find the form *Elle* where the double "l" of the syllable is preserved, while its last vowel changes from "a" to "e", perhaps under the influence of the name *Ellēn*. Finally, in the *Martyrium of Arethas*, the *Acts of Gregentius* and the inscriptions on the coins, the form *el*, with single "l" is used. As for the second part of the name 'Ella-Aṣbeha, it appears in the Greek sources modified either according to Greek endings or to Biblical names of the Septuagint.

We may thus conclude that each Byzantine author has his own form of transliteration which is not necessarily a literal imitation of previous sources.

Proterius — Timotheus:

The mention of Proterius as patriarch of Alexandria during this period is a puzzling one: Patriarch Proterius reigned in Alexandria only in the 5th century A.D. Of the various explanations which have been offered, the most plausible is that the author of the *Acts of Gregentius*, in his zealous effort to orthodoxize his work, simply changed the name of Timotheus (518-535 A.D.), the current monophysite patriarch of Alexandria, and inserted that of the orthodox Proterius.^{66a}

Dounaa (dhu-Nuwās):

The final name which can be used as a chronological terminus for these events, that of the Jewish Himyarite king, has been a controversial subject for many years. In the *Book of the Himyarites*, it is given as Masrūq, a name so abhorrent that it is always written upside down. In certain Arabic sources the Jewish Himyarite king appears as dhu-Nuwās, an appellation which has been considered to be either a nickname (*laqāb*) meaning the "one with the locks,"⁶⁷ or a genuine Himyarite name. His full name Yūsuf 'Asar is revealed in the Himyarite inscriptions (Ry. 507 and 508).⁶⁸ None of the Greek literary sources mention the name *Kāleb* for the

Ethiopian king or Yūsuf for the Himyarite king.⁶⁹ In the *Martyrium* of Arethas and the *Acts* of Gregentis, the Himyarite king is called *Dounaa* or *Dounaan*; the *Dounaan* is not always the accusative form of *Dounaas* as Smith asserts,⁷⁰ but appears also as an indeclinable noun form, like *Elesboam*, according to the form of the Biblical names ending in *an* (*Elisafan*, etc.).

To further complicate matters, the Ethiopian Negus 'Ella-Aṣbeha and the Himyarite King Yūsuf dhu-Nuwās have been also identified respectively with the two kings *Anda-Dimnos* as mentioned by Malalas,⁷¹ *Adad-Damianos* by Theophanes,⁷² and *Aidug-Dimium* by the Syriac author John of Ephesus (preserved by Dionysus of Tell-Amra.)⁷³ According to all of these sources, the conflict which arose between these two monarchs was provoked by the Himyarite mistreatment of the Byzantine merchants who frequented Yemen and it subsequently caused the disruption of the Ethiopian trade. Malalas in his description of this conflict obviously equates events of an earlier period with the struggle between dhu-Nuwās and 'Ella-Aṣbeha. His confused chronology first manifests itself in his statement that these events took place during the simultaneous reigns of the early 6th century of Justin (Justin I) and the Goth king Alaric (*ca.* 450 A.D.). Furthermore, while it is well known from all other sources — hagiographical as well as numismatic — that 'Ella-Aṣbeha was a Christian and that one of the reasons underlying his expedition against the Jewish Himyarite King dhu-Nuwās was the latter's mistreatment of the Christians of South Arabia, Malalas presents the king of Ethiopia as a pagan who converted to Christianity only after his victory over the Himyarites. Numismatic evidence indicates that Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia a whole century before the Himyarite-Ethiopian war of 523/4, and thus the king could not be pagan.⁷⁴ Theophanes clearly distinguishes this early episode from the 6th century Ethiopian-Himyarite struggle.⁷⁵ On the other hand, Malalas' judgment that commercial motivation inspired these earlier events suggests that perhaps this played a role in the Negus 'Ella-'Aṣbeha's plan to interfere in the affairs of Yemen.⁷⁶

The sources which mention the Adad-Aidug struggle also relate that a certain bishop John from Alexandria was sent to Ethiopia. Though this reference raised the possibility that the latter should be identified with Bishop Gregentius, we shall see that such an identification is impossible.

Archbishop Gregentius:

According to the *Acts* of Gregentius, during the Ethiopian occupation which followed the Massacre of Negran, Bishop Gregentius played a dominant role in the affairs of South Arabia. It should be noted here that all sources of this period present fragmentary and confused information about the re-established Himyarite church and its archbishop. As a result even the very existence of Bishop Gregentius has been challenged by some scholars.⁷⁷

The first argument against the existence of Bishop Gregentius, or any Byzantine bishop sent to South Arabia after the defeat of dhu-Nuwās, rests on the absence of any information about him in the *Book of the Himyarites*. The *Book of the Himyarites* explicitly says that only Ethiopian clergymen under the Ethiopian archbishop Eutrepus were sent to South Arabia. This argument can be easily dismissed. According to the *Fetha-Neghest*, ch. IV, n 42, the Ethiopian Church, from its beginning until recently, never had the right to choose a patriarch (*Abouna*)

of Ethiopian origin. The *Abouna* was actually an acting patriarch, under the jurisdiction of the seat of Alexandria, elevated by the Egyptian clergymen. Moreover, he normally has never had the right to choose any archbishop and when granted this right he could not pick them from among the Ethiopians.⁷⁸ Thus, an archbishop with highest ecclesiastical authority over the Himyarites, is impossible.

Gregentius is often mistakenly equated, as it has been previously noted, with a certain John Paramonarius of the Church of Alexandria, mentioned by Malalas and appearing in the Syriac sources as *Firmounara*. It is clearly apparent from these sources that this bishop was sent to Ethiopia and not to South Arabia. Michael the Syrian, who offers the clearest account of this subject, mentions in consecutive passages two bishops, John Paramonarius who was dispatched to Ethiopia and another anonymous bishop of the Himyarites.⁷⁹

Three of the most important sources, the *Syriac Chronicle of Michael the Syrian*, the *Martyrium* of Arethas, and the *Acts* of Gregentius uniformly inform us that the patriarch of Alexandria appointed an archbishop of South Arabia immediately after the defeat of dhu-Nuwās. But while the two Greek sources present the archbishop as an orthodox Christian, the Syriac monophysite author Michael underlines the fact that Timothy, the patriarch of Alexandria, was a monophysite as was the bishop elected by him.

Unfortunately, none of the sources (with the exception of the *Acts* of Gregentius) describe extensively the activities of the Byzantine bishop of South Arabia. The *Martyrium* of Arethas briefly states that the archbishop of South Arabia, whose name is not mentioned, consecrated churches and ordained clergymen throughout the country of the Himyarites.⁸⁰ The *Chronicle* of John, Bishop of Ephesus, as preserved in the text of pseudo-Dionysius of Tel Mahre, offers a few glimpses of the Himyarite church at this period.

John, Bishop of Ephesus, relates that the archbishop sent by the patriarch of Alexandria, who is not mentioned by name, died shortly after his elevation. After his death the monophysite Himyarites refused to accept any archbishop appointed by the patriarch of Alexandria, Theodosius (535-538 A.D.),⁸¹ who had succeeded Timothy, because Theodosius was orthodox. Consequently, the seat of South Arabia remained vacant for twenty-two years.⁸² Thus, John of Ephesus contradicts the *Acts* of Gregentius which state that Gregentius' episcopate lasted thirty years.⁸³

In his effort to edify by giving praise to the activities of Gregentius, the author of the *Acts* most probably intentionally lengthened the span of his life. It should be noticed nevertheless that the length of Gregentius' tenure as bishop was not in fact short, since, according to John, Bishop of Ephesus, he died after the expulsion of Timothy from the throne of Alexandria (536 A.D.). During his period of about ten years Gregentius was able to organize the Himyarite church.

C. Main Events — Punishment by Fire:

While most of the information concerning the main events of the Massacre of Negran is trivial and appears in all sources, the description of the methods used to put the martyrs to death is extremely important. In the *Martyrium* of Arethas and the *Book of the Himyarites* the martyrs are slain by sword.⁸⁴ A second type of death, execution by hanging, is mentioned in the *Book of the Himyarites*,

but does not occur in the *Martyrium* of Arethas. The *Acts* of Gregentius describe yet a third means of the martyrs' extermination, the use of fire. Death by fire has been associated with two long disputed verses of the Qur'ān (Sura 85⁴⁻⁶) which describe a trench full of fire where the martyrs were thrown:

Dead are the Men of the Pit
The Fire (abounding in) fed with fuel
when they were seated over it.

In general, this passage has been accepted as referring to the martyrs of Negrān. In Ibn-Ishāq's *Sūrat al-Rusūl*, as in the Qur'an, dhu-Nuwas is called trench-maker.⁸⁵ According to Ishāq, "... he dug trenches for them [martyrs]; burnt some in fire, slew some with the sword ...".⁸⁶ Although the Arabic tradition, and particularly the authors of the *Tafsīr* of the Qur'ān, clearly associate Sura 85⁴⁻⁶ with the Massacre of Negrān⁸⁷, some commentators do not accept this correlation. Instead, these verses are considered a reference to the casting of Shadrach, Meschach and Abed-nego into the burning fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:19-21). It seems most likely that there is a confusion between the historical event of the Massacre of Negrān and the Biblical episode.⁸⁸

The *Acts* of Gregentius are the literary source which best corroborate the information found in the Qur'ān and the Arabic tradition. They explicitly report that fire was the primary punitive measure taken against the martyrs of Negrān.

The Himyarite king ordered a most violent and long lasting fire (σφοδροτάτης)⁸⁹ for the purpose of burning the populace to death. The description of the fire is similar in the Qur'ān and the *Acts* of Gregentius⁹⁰:

Qur'ān النار ذات الوقود *Acts* Πυρκαϊάν σφοδροτάτην ἀναπτῆναι κελεύσας

The particular emphasis placed on the use of fire for the annihilation of the martyrs in the Arabic sources, as Conti Rossini points out, agrees with its predominating role in punishment in South Arabia.⁹¹ Moberg has also noted many examples of the use of fire torture for the Himyarite martyrs in the *Book of the Himyarites* and the *Martyrium* of Arethas⁹².

The death by fire suffered by the Christian martyrs has been seen by R. B. Serjeant as related in some way to an old religious rite of South Arabia, i.e., fire walking.⁹³ As he notes, even today fire walking over a burning palm trunk is practiced in Yemen.

To Serjeant's plausible remarks concerning martyrdom by fire, we can add examples from the literary sources which illustrate similar practices. Al-Mašūdi clearly refers to burning charcoal in the trench where the martyrs were thrown.⁹⁴ Such burning charcoal is reminiscent of the practices of the *Anastenarides* in northern Greece, who in religious exaltation step over burning coals. Moreover, other the literary sources provide similar examples. In the Ethiopian *Acts* of Azkir, Azkir, the apostle of Christianity in South Arabia, escaped unharmed when he was placed on a flaming pyre.⁹⁵ According to al-Maqqdisī, a Himyarite king who reigned before dhu-Nuwās possessed a fire issuing from a mountain which would consume the pagans but spare the Jews⁹⁶.

The emphasis placed on punishment by fire for the Negrānites distinguishes the account of the *Acts* of Gregentius from that of the *Martyrium* of Arethas and

brings them closer to the Arabic and Ethiopian traditions. It now seems probable that the similarities between the Arabic and Ethiopic sources and the *Acts* of Gregentius should be traced to a common tradition, most probably oral.

4. South Arabia during the Ethiopian Expedition and Occupation in the *Acts* of Gregentius

A. *Activities of the Ethiopian King 'Ella-'Aṣbeha in South Arabia*

In Gregentius' *Acts*, the sweeping scale of the Negus' campaign following his invasion in South Arabia is described with characteristic realism. It is to be noticed that in the *Martyrium* of Arethas the Ethiopian conquerors appear as crusaders inspired solely by the desire to restore Christianity in South Arabia. No mention is made in this source of the plunder and slaughter of thousands of Himyarites in the course of the Negus' expedition, although these brutalities are described in other sources, e.g., Procopius' *History*⁹⁷ and the *Book of the Himyarites*. The *Acts* of Gregentius also give a similar account of atrocities committed by the Ethiopians. The *Book of the Himyarites* asserts that the Ethiopian army roamed about the capital Ṣafār and other neighbouring towns, robbing and massacring the Himyarites.⁹⁸ The Ethiopians pledged, however, to spare the life of Christian Himyarites who tattooed the sign of the cross on their hands. Many Jews, seeing their fellow Himyarites-Christians reprieved, tattooed themselves with the same symbol and thus escaped death⁹⁹.

The *Acts* of Gregentius, despite their edificatory purpose which involved glorifying the Ethiopian and Himyarite-Christians while denigrating the Jews, portrayed the Ethiopian Christians as brutal and cruel. According to the *Acts* the Ethiopian Christians unscrupulously plundered the palace of the Jewish king in Ṣafār. They pitilessly killed most of the city's inhabitants while the remainder, terrified at the sight of their countrymen's slaughter, converted to Christianity in order to escape death.¹⁰⁰ Both the *Acts* of Gregentius and the *Book of the Himyarites* report that many Jews decided to continue their own religion in secret after being forced to participate in a token baptism into Christianity in order to escape death.

The time spent by the Ethiopian king in South Arabia is described as three years in the *Acts* of Gregentius.¹⁰¹ This is an exaggeration and actually represents the three years which elapsed between the Massacre of Negran in 523 A.D. and the appointment of the Negus' successor in South Arabia in the year 526 A.D. While the *Martyrium* of Arethas simply indicates that the Negus returned to Ethiopia where he retired after defeating the Himyarites, the *Acts* of Gregentius give us an extensive description of his withdrawal from the world. The treatment of the Negus' retirement in the *Acts* of Gregentius reveals undisputable similarities with the Ethiopian tradition, surviving until the present day. The description of the particular place of retreat and the Negus' austere life there bear startling resemblance to each other in the *Acts* of Gregentius and the Ethiopic *Book of Senkesar*. The latter, written ca. the 12th century, simply translates a great part of the *Synaxarium* of the Jacobite Church of Egypt from Arabic into Ethiopic. Its special value lies in the fact that it adds to the *Synaxarium* contemporary material derived from local traditions concerning the saints venerated in Ethiopia.¹⁰²

Ethiopian text

And he entered the monastery which was on the top of the mountain of Abba Pantaleon wherein monks lived, and lived in a cell, the doors whereof he shut so that he might see no man, and he swore that he would never go outside the cell and that he would never see the world again.

And he took nothing with him except a mat to lie upon, an earthenware pot, and the apparel of the monk which he wore, and his food consisted of nothing but bread and salt, and his drink was water.

His royal crown and his royal apparel, which were of great price, he sent to Jerusalem. And he wrote a letter to Abba John, archbishop of Jerusalem, asking him to hang up the crown above the doors of the Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Greek text

He handed over his kingdom to his own son Atherphotahm and he himself put on a tunic of hair, and went up onto the mountain called Ophra, which is situated in the wilderness (and which according to the saying almost contendeth with the clouds for the sky). And there he completely isolated himself within a small, dark dwelling of earth. And, sealing off the entrance to the cave, he spent there all the days of his life, seen by none, and not associating (conversing) with anyone, completed a life like unto an angel's; and thus he came to God pure and blameless. His sustenance he received from monks who lived in the neighbourhood — the food being passed through a hole by one of them, who could come up from the monastery farther down the mountain and then retrace his steps.

But the similarities between the Byzantine and Ethiopian tradition do not end here. It has escaped the notice of scholars that the Ethiopian source of the *Acts* of Azkir presents a dialogue between a Jewish king and a Christian saint, Azkir, in the former's court; the reverse of Gregentius' dialogue which is between a Christian king (under the aegis of the Christian bishop) and a Jew in the Himyarite Court. Following the pattern of Gregentius' dialogue, Azkir travels from Negrān to Ḥafār where he stood before the Himyarite king and began to debate with the Jews at Court about the meaning of certain passages of the Bible¹⁰³.

The *Acts* of Azkir refer to the second half of the 5th century, the period of the establishment of Christianity in Negrān when King Sarahbil Yaḳūf ruled Ḥafār.¹⁰⁴ It should be kept in mind that in the *Acts* of Azkir later events which took place during the reign of dhu-Nuwās were often confused with the earlier events. Thus, it is most probable that the author of the *Acts* of Gregentius drew information from the same early tradition that inspired the *Acts* of Azkir.

B. The Successors of dhu-Nuwās:

The inscriptions inform us that before the Negus 'Ella-'Aṣbeha departed from South Arabia, he set up a provisional ruler over the Himyarites. This ruler, given the title of controller, was a sort of viceroy; he did not possess the authority to act independently but only with the approval of the Ethiopian throne.¹⁰⁵ According to these inscriptions, his name was Ṣumu-Yafa 'Aṣwa' (Smyf 'šw') and he was a member of the same royal family to which the Jewish Himyarite king belonged. That Ṣumu-Yafa' was related to dhu-Nuwās is not surprising since the *Acts* of Gregentius inform us that a few members of the royal family who escaped death at the hands of the Ethiopians returned to the Himyarite palace in Ḥafār.

Conspicuously, all Christian sources, whether Syriac or Greek chose to omit the name of this provisional ruler of the Himyarites. Instead they refer to Šumu-Yafa's successor, Abraha, as the first king to be placed on the Ethiopian throne after the death of dhu-Nuwās¹⁰⁶.

The motivation behind the omission of the first Himyarite King Šumu-Yafā by Christian authors is obvious. The Christian sources with their edificatory viewpoint present the Negus and his Himyarite king as models of piety and Christianity while the Jewish king is viewed as the personification of evil. Any situation or attitude which contradicts this portrayal is unacceptable and deleted from the narration of these events. To present the first Himyarite Christian King Šumu-Yafaā and his quarrel with Abraha or the latter's usurpation of the throne would have contradicted Abraha's characterization as a model of ideal Christian behaviour. In similar fashion Christian sources describe the relations between Abraha and the Ethiopian Negus 'Ella-'Aṣbeha, well known to be strained, as cordial. This directly contradicts the inscriptions which inform us that 'Ella-'Aṣbeha remained uncompromising and aggressive, stubbornly refusing to recognize Abraha as his viceroy.

Of all the literary sources, it is only the work of Procopius, written by an author completely indifferent to Christianity, which offers us a realistic description of the conflict between Šumu-Yafa — transliterated as *Esimiphaioi*—and Abraha.¹⁰⁷ Allusions to this episode are also found in the Arabic tradition¹⁰⁸.

The author of the *Acts* of Gregentius conforms to the pattern of other Christian sources in omitting Šumu-Yafa. He praises the harmonious relations maintained by the two pillars of Christianity, the Negus 'Ella-'Aṣbeha and the Himyarite King Abraha on both sides of Bab el-Mandeb.

While the *Martyrium* of Arethas makes no mention of the length of Abraha's rule and reports nothing about his successor, the *Acts* of Gregentius specify that King Abraha reigned in South Arabia for thirty years, a period which corresponds roughly with that given by the inscriptions. The *Acts* of Gregentius also mention Abraha's successor, his son Masrūq. We know from inscriptions and the Arabic sources that Abraha had a son called Masrūq who reigned for about three years.¹⁰⁹ As Smith correctly pointed out, the name Masrūq comes from the Syriac root *seriqo* meaning worthless¹¹⁰ and most probably is a nickname (*laqāb*) attributed to Abraha's son because of his notorious inefficiency. In the *Acts* of Gregentius the name appears with the form *Seriqos*,¹¹¹ and less correctly, *Serdidos*.¹¹²

C. Some References to the Social Structure of the Himyarites¹¹³

The *Martyrium* of Arethas mentions three classes of nobility, the *ēthnarchai*, *megistanai* and *archegoi*, corresponding roughly to the clan chief (*Kabīr*), the princes (*Kail*) and the clan chiefs with administrative authority (*Kabīr*) who are often cited in the Himyarite inscriptions. The classifications *ēthnarchai* and *megistanai*, appear again in the *Life* of Gregentius with the substitution of the term *satrapai* (for *archēga*). The new term, *satrapai*, used commonly in classical Greek to denote governors of provinces in the Persian Empire, approaches more closely the Himyarite official *Kabīr*, whose duties included the governing of provinces. In the Himyarite inscriptions, the *Kabīr* are often cited as supervising irrigation works, building dams, etc. Clear allusions are made in the *Acts* of Gregentius to the overseeing of a *corvée* of workers by the Himyarite *megistanai* during the construction of churches.

The most important data on the socio-political structure consists of the passage referring to the election and coronation of the Ethiopian Abraha as king of the Himyarites. The information is corroborated by the Himyarite inscriptions and the Arabic sources, according to which the nobility occupied a prominent position in the Himyarite society. The King (Malik) was in fact nothing more than the *Primus inter pares* and in his decisions he consulted with the assembly of the nobles (Msud):¹¹⁴ The *Acts* of Gregentius assert that the Assembly (σύγκλητος) played a particular role in the coronation of King Abraha.

Additional information concerning the specific responsibilities of various administrative officials is also given in the *Laws* of Gregentius, but is beyond the scope of the present work.

D. *The Nature of Christianity:*

In the *Martyrium* of Arethas both the Ethiopians and the Christian Arabs of Negran are presented as stalwart and dedicated orthodox Christians. This picture of Christianity in Negran is not supported by the research of contemporary scholars who suggest that the Negranites were monophysites.

How the newly converted Himyarites worshipped, in what language their liturgy was spoken, and how their clergy were organized, is barely dealt with in the *Acts* of Gregentius. Moreover, scarcely anything is known from any other sources about the religious practices and organization of the newly converted Himyarites. The most important recent works dealing with this subject are those by J. Ryckmans¹¹⁵ and Andrae¹¹⁶ whose conclusions will be briefly presented before proceeding to a more detailed discussion of Christianity in South Arabia. Ryckmans and Andrae distinguish two different traditions which helped to shape Himyarite Christianity in South Arabia, the Syrian which entered South Arabia from the north and the Byzantine-Ethiopian which infiltrated from the southwest.

The Syrian monophysite tradition was introduced into South Arabia from Negran, a city maintaining constant relations with Iraq and Mesopotamia which were areas where Syriac was the language spoken by monophysite Christians. Arabic and Ethiopic sources inform us that Christianity entered Negran in the middle of the 5th century from al-Hīra of Iraq. The close contact between al-Hīra and Negran is shown by the fact that King dhu-Nuwās sent the news of the Massacre at Negran to the pagan king al-Mundhir in al-Hīra. The use of the Syriac language in the Himyarite liturgy of Negran assumed by Andrae is highly plausible, although no source clearly documents it.

During the same period, Christianity made headway in South Arabia from a base in the coastal region of the southwest. The Byzantines managed to secure a foothold on the coast of western Yemen as early as the time of the reign of Constans (435-515 A.D.) according to the testimony of Philostorgius. The Arian Emperor Constans acquired permission from the Himyarite King abu-Karib Asad Kamil to build three churches, one in Aden, one in Zafār, and the third in an unspecified town at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. Although an Arian bishop, called Theophile the Indian, was nominated by the Arians as bishop of Zafār, the total impact of the Byzantines on the Himyarites was negligible because of the increasing influence of Judaism at this period. The only remnant of Byzantine activity which was retained was the use of the form *qalis* meaning church, derived from the

Greek ἐκκληκτῇ in some inscriptions of the area of Zafār, instead of the usual Aramaic form.

Simultaneously, Christianity of the Ethiopian type entered South Arabia from the southwestern coast of Yemen in the early 5th century. It seems that the Ethiopians during the 5th and early 6th centuries occupied the coastal area of Ashir where they established their own form of monophysite Christianity. Naturally, after King Abraha's invasion and occupation of the country of Himyar, the Ethiopian influence greatly increased. Andrae expresses the opinion that the Himyarite church was thoroughly Ethiopianized at this period.

To these conclusions formulated by Andrae and Ryckmans, we may add the following considerations based on all of the well-known sources, with the addition of Gregentius' *Acts*. The churches constructed by the Byzantines in South Arabia during the reign of Constans, although undoubtedly used from an early date as centers to promote Christian doctrine among the Himyarites, were originally designed for the Byzantines who resided or stopped in Yemen. The existence of a considerable number of Byzantine merchants in South Arabia is documented by two sailing manuals for the navigation of the Arabian Gulf, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, now established to have been written in the 3rd century A.D., and Marcian's *Periplus of the Outer Sea* dating ca. 4th century. A.D.

Cosmas Indicopleustes, who was in Adulis when 'Ella-'Aṣbeha was preparing his expedition against the Himyarites, and another merchant mentioned by Cosmas as Menas, represent Byzantine merchants involved in trading who remained strongly dedicated to the Christian church. Both Cosmas and Menas began their careers as merchants and ended as monks in Sinai. Cosmas was undoubtedly orthodox and it is likely that Menas was as well.

How all these Greek-speaking Christian Byzantines participated in the Syriac or Ethiopian services in the Himyarite churches is difficult to depict. One can hypothesize that in the churches founded on the Persian Gulf in Aden and Hormouz where few native Christians existed, part of the liturgy, if not all, would be performed in Greek. Naturally some of the Byzantine worshippers would be orthodox Christians like Cosmas, a fact of very great importance in tracing the sources of the *Acts* of Gregentius and the *Martyrium* of Arethas. The lack of any substantial religious participation on the part of the natives of those coastal towns may account for the rapid decline of the churches after the 4th century.

The form of Christianity practised by the Himyarites also presents certain problems. It is difficult to determine if independent Himyarite clergy were developed, and what language was used in the service in areas away from the Persian Gulf.

Perhaps a look at the parallel situation of Christianity in North Arabia could prove helpful in illuminating the conditions in South Arabia. Since Christianity did not penetrate deeply into the pre-Islamic North Arab world, Christian congregations were found only in those districts in which a mixed Arab, Greek and Roman population resided, and where a more developed form of culture existed. Those Arabs who entered into the ranks of the church were in one or another way Hellenized. The papyri and inscriptions of Nessana (Auja el Hafir) in Negeb¹¹⁷ supplemented by information found in the *Itinerarium of Etheria*,¹¹⁸ offer us a view of the form taken by Christianity in North Arabia. This in turn may give us an idea of Southern Arab Christianity.

The numerous Arabic names which appear in the inscriptions and papyri of North Arabia indicate that Arabs formed the bulk of the population. Most of the *limitanei* in Nessana were native Arabs who used Greek as their official language. Greek would have been fashionable among the upper class Arabs, although it was unknown to the mass of the population who spoke only Arabic and/or Syriac. There is no doubt that the humble, illiterate town dwellers knew only their native language, as evidenced in the *Life* of Hilarion which asserts that the Arabs who addressed Hilarion in the nearby town of Elusa spoke to him in their native language rather than in Greek.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the shallow degree of the Arabs' knowledge of Greek is manifested in the error-filled papyri and inscriptions.

The Arab clergy of Nessana, as in the whole of North Arabia, were incorporated into the Byzantine church. Keeping their native names and/or adding Christian names, these clergy read the Bible and the liturgical books in Greek. It is clear that their upper class parishioners, partially Hellenized, understood the Greek liturgy; we can only guess how the humble Christian townspeople participated in the church services. Our chief clue is found in the *Itinerarium of Etheria* which mentions that in the province of Palestine one segment of the population knew both Greek and Syriac, another only Greek and a third group spoke only Syriac. In this case, the scripture was read in the Greek in the church and translated simultaneously by a Syriac interpreter¹²⁰.

We know of only one case of independent Arab speaking clergy with an Arab bishop at its head: that of the nomadic pre-Islamic *parembolai* cited in the *Life* of Euthymios¹²¹. But even this clerical hierarchy was a part of the Byzantine Church and we lack any more specific information as to the Arab clergy's function. Christian Arabs kept their independent cast by adopting heresies having a basis in their Semitic background. This is evident not only after the 5th century when many of them assimilated monophysite doctrines but perhaps more obviously in the creation of heresies in the 3rd century. These Semitic-based heresies involved beliefs in the soul being blood, and in death when the body dies.¹²²

The Christianity of the Himyarites presents features similar to those of the Christian Northern Arabs, the intrusion of Semitic pagan elements under the disguise of Christian ritual in South Arabia.¹²³ The Himyarites, like the Northern Arabs, never formed an independent native-speaking church but became part of the Byzantine church. This dependence on the Byzantine church occurred despite the fact that the Christian Himyarites were monophysites using the Syriac language in church services. In Negrān, as we learn from the *Book of the Himyarites*, educated Himyarites formed part of the clergy, a clergy composed both of natives and foreigners. Among the Himyarite martyrs of Negrān mentioned by the *Book of the Himyarites* are the following foreign clergymen: two Arabs from al-Ḥirā, two Byzantines, one Persian and an Abyssinian.¹²⁴ Details concerning the organization of the Christian church in South Arabia are lacking.

The churches previously mentioned as established by Constans were probably not yet organized in the middle of the 4th century. It is only later that the church would have been structured according to the description found in the *Acts* of Gregentius. The *Acts*, the sole source on the organization of the church, mention explicitly the existence of an archbishop (ἀρχιεπίσκοπος) with his seat at Ḥafār. He was appointed there, as will be explained, not by the Ethiopian Church, but by the patriarch of Alexandria with the consent of the emperor. This archbishop of Ḥafār had the duty of consecrating the bishops in the other cities of Arabia;

thus, Archbishop Gregentius appears as selecting and consecrating bishops in each town. Because the Byzantines selected directly only the archbishop of Zafār, it can be concluded that a certain Sylvanius, mentioned by Theodor Lector¹²⁵ as sent by the Byzantines to South Arabia, took charge of the seat of Zafār and not that of Negran as asserted by some scholars. Furthermore, Sylvanius should not be identified with Bishop Paul of Negran mentioned in the *Martyrium* of Arethas since the latter was appointed by the archbishop of Zafār, not by the Byzantines.

The liturgical language used in Negran was most probably Syriac, the language of both the monophysites and of the Nestorians. It is in Syriac that the leader of Negran discussed the subtleties of Christian theology with dhu-Nuwās. This language was the language of the educated; the bulk of the Himyarite population — as the counterparts in the towns of North Arabia — understood little of Syriac. For example, King dhu-Nuwās' messenger spoke to the people of Negran in the vernacular, the Himyarite (Ὠμηρίτης διάλεκτος) language. These considerations point to the use of an interpreter or a bilingual priest in the church. The appearance of the work *Rahmān* and the mention of the Christian triad in the inscriptions of South Arabia are the only evidence of the use of the Himyarite language to convey the message of Christianity. No Bible or liturgical texts were composed for the Southern Arabs, as neither a Bible nor liturgical books were written in the language of the Northern Arabs.

In Zafār and the vicinity, although Ethiopian priests were sent to serve the needs of the Christian Ethiopian soldiers, Syriac speaking priests would have been in the majority. Ryckmans and Andrae cite a permanent Ethiopian enclave in the district of Asir in southeast Yemen to support their belief in a strong Ethiopian influence in the Himyarite church and its liturgical language. Such an Ethiopian influence, however, was slight, until 'Ella-Aṣbeha's victory in 524/6 A.D. The *Book of the Himyarites* explicitly speaks about the lack of a common language between Ethiopians and Himyarites. Only the application of tattoos of the Christian cross on their hands enabled the Himyarites to show the Ethiopians that they were Christian.¹²⁶ Naturally, the Ethiopian occupation increased the intensity of the Ethiopianization of the church. The *Acts* of Gregentius describe the cooperation which took place between Ethiopian conquerors and the Himyarite Church, resulting in a modified church-state combination to safeguard the success of the occupation.¹²⁸ It should be kept in mind nevertheless that this occupation lasted no more than half a century.

In Zafār after 527 A.D., it is probable that Ethiopic and Syriac were used hand in hand as the church languages, with an additional use of the Himyarite language for the congregation's humbler members. As for the Greek language, its use is doubtful in Zafār, and even in the coastal towns, where the presence of Byzantine merchants tended to encourage it, the speaking of the Greek language, probably faded as the years passed.

5. Sources, Oral Tradition

Vasiliev, who was the first to publish sections of the *Acts* of Gregentius¹²⁹, expressed no doubt about the existence of Archbishop Gregentius or the authenticity of his *Acts*. He considered the *Acts* to reflect real historical and social conditions of 6th century South Arabia. While his position was shared by certain scholars, others dismissed the *Acts* of Gregentius as simply mythological compilations.

Among this latter group is J. Ryckmans, one of the most authoritative of those who have unquestioningly rejected the authenticity of Gregentius' *Acts*¹³⁰. He bases his evaluation on the work of H. Gregoire who flatly dismisses the value of the *Acts* of Gregentius and views them as an imaginary romance¹³¹. But Gregoire's repudiation of the *Acts*, and therefore Ryckmans', is highly questionable. Gregoire applied the same criteria he used for the *Acts* in his rejection of the *Book of the Himyarites*, a text now generally accepted as authentic.

Recently, Patlagian, while correctly emphasizing the unity of Gregentius' *Acts* and the necessity of examining the *Laws* in connection with the other works of the *Acts*, failed to scrutinize the relation of the *Acts* of Gregentius to other relevant sources.¹³² She considered the *Acts* as belonging to a group of Lives written in Italy ca. the 10th century. Patlagian's statement, "La *Vie* de Grigentios repose pour sa dernière partie, sur les *Actes* d'Arethas,"¹³³ can easily be dismissed as incorrect; as we have seen, many elements which exist in the *Acts* of Gregentius do not appear in the *Acts* of Arethas (*Martyrium*), or in any other Greek source. Some of these elements, however, are found in the Arabic and Syriac sources. Moreover, it has been shown that some striking similarities exist also between the Greek and the Ethiopic traditions.¹³⁴ Patlagian's assertion, "C'est seulement dans les *Actes* aussi que le roi ('Ella-Aṣbeha) se retire au desert," illustrates her failure to compare the *Acts* of Gregentius with other sources. This information, as we have seen, not only appears in the written Ethiopic sources, but exists to this day in oral Ethiopian legend.

In the course of this paper, it has been shown that the author of the *Acts* of Gregentius did not draw his information solely from Greek sources but included material found in non-Greek sources. And, as Pigulevskaja has pointed out, and the additional material cited in this work attests, the author of the *Acts* of Gregentius presents certain realistic elements which reflect the conditions prevailing in South Arabia in the early 6th century. The question thus arises, how did the author of the *Acts* of Gregentius derive his information?

The author was clearly not a mere compiler of various Greek sources, but a writer who was familiar with events recorded by the Syriac and Ethiopic sources. The reflections of reality found in the *Acts* of Gregentius manifest an author with first-hand experience.

While a certain familiarity with non-Greek sources on the part of the author of the *Acts* of Gregentius is highly probable, the answer to the derivation of elements shared by the *Acts* and by the non-Greek texts can rather be traced to the oral tradition than to any literary influence.

The oral tradition, discussed by Moberg in his study of the *Book of the Himyarites*,¹³⁵ and emphasized by Birschberg in his work concerning its authorship¹³⁶, was transmitted through a variety of channels. It should be emphasized that language does not form a barrier in the transmission of oral tradition. The oral tradition reflected not only reality but legendary material. Thus, the dialogue between a Jew and a Christian in a palace court described by both the *Acts* of Azkir and Gregentius' *Acts* (Dialogue) could have actually taken place, could mingle real and legendary material or could be purely invention. We may assume that our author, living in South Arabia in the mid-6th century, was well acquainted with oral traditions concerning the contemporary events. The similarities between the Qur'ān, the Ethiopic *Synaxarium* and the *Acts* of Gregentius should be traced to the oral tradition. Similarly, parallelisms in the works of Ethiopian, Himyarite,

or Northern Arab authors writing about Christianity in South Arabia can often be explained as deriving simply from this common reservoir of oral stories instead of from any literary influences.

The tradition concerning the Himyarite Christianization, since different languages did not stand as obstacles in its diffusion, is not exclusive to Syriac but could exist in many languages simultaneously. The author of the *Acts* of Gregentius thus probably derived his material at least in part from an oral Greek source. As we have seen, Greek merchants frequented South Arabia, and Greek was the language of some of the clergymen who arrived from Alexandria with Gregentius. Our author states in his preface, "I have collected my material from what I heard and my ancestors heard."

The influence of the oral tradition also explains the discrepancy between the orthodox spirit of the *Acts* of Gregentius and prevailing monophysite tendencies of the inhabitants of Negran. The author, most probably a Greek-speaking orthodox merchant who visited and lived in the ports of South Arabia, heard about these events and gave them orthodox coverage.

The identity of the author of the *Acts* of Gregentius is almost impossible to discover. Krumbacher has remarked that the *Dialogue* mentions Palladius, a secretary who took notes on the discourse between Gregentius and the Jew, and he expresses the opinion that the author of the *Acts* of Gregentius based his work on these notes¹³⁷.

A Manuscript of Athos mentions the name of the author, a certain Palladius from Alexandria¹³⁸; perhaps we can identify this Palladius of the Manuscript with the secretary called Palladius. But his assertion is difficult to support since such a name does not appear in the oldest manuscript of Sinai. While the identification of author of the *Acts* of Gregentius is a matter of guesswork, we can definitely place the terminus.

The absence of any mention of the pagan Persian occupation of South Arabia ca. 570 A.D., or of the Moslem takeover some fifty years later, gives a strong indication that the author lived before the Persian occupation and the following Islamic conquest (610 A.D.). It seems highly improbable that any writer living in South Arabia after these events transpired would have refrained from describing such a spectacular finish to the Christian kingdom of South Arabia by the pagans and Moslems.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Acts* of Gregentius form a continuation of the Syriac *Book of the Himyarites* and the Greek version of the *Martyrium* of Arethas. They describe the activities of Archbishop Gregentius after the Massacre of Negran and during the Ethiopian occupation of South Arabia (ca. 530 A.D.).

Gregentius, appointed as archbishop of the Himyarites, was sent to South Arabia by the patriarch of Alexandria with the consent of the Byzantine Emperor Justin I (518-527 A.D.).

The author of the *Acts* was a Greek-speaking Byzantine and obviously an orthodox Christian. He may have belonged to the entourage of laymen and clergymen who accompanied Gregentius from Alexandria, or perhaps he was a Byzantine merchant. In either case it seems likely that the author retired to Mount Sinai to write the *Acts*. It should be noted that the oldest extant manuscript comes from Mount Sinai.

The orthodox Christian Byzantine bias of the author occasionally resulted in alterations of the events which took place during the Ethiopian occupation of South Arabia.

The author of the *Acts* lived in South Arabia *ca.* 530 A.D. and definitely before the year 570 A.D. when the Zoroastrian Persians overthrew the Christian Ethiopian occupation of South Arabia. This event and the following conquest of South Arabia by the Moslems (*ca.* 580 A.D.) are conspicuously absent in the *Acts*. Both these events were not only a bitter blow to the Ethiopians and Byzantines, but threw the whole of Christendom into consternation, and it is highly improbable that our author would fail to record them, had he lived.

The main source drawn upon by the author of the *Acts* of Gregentius was the local oral tradition, although some knowledge of written sources is not unlikely. A vast multilingual repertoire of contemporary oral narrations existed in South Arabia relating the events which transpired there at the turn of the sixth century. Similarities among all relevant literary sources in Syriac, Ethiopic, Greek, and Arabic are often to be traced to this oral tradition rather than to any literary influence.

The events described in the *Acts* of Gregentius reflect realistically the existing social and political conditions of South Arabia. They corroborate and enrich the information found in the other literary sources and inscriptions and can be of great value if used properly.

Appendix A.

Fragments from the *Life* of Gregentius (*Cod. Sinait. Graec.* 437, fol. 57 ff. and *Cod. Ierosolym.* (Stavrou-5), fol. 137 ff.

It was, then, while the blessed Gregentius was in Alexandria, at the time when Justin reigned over the Romans (= Byzantines), and Elesboa over Ethiopia, and Proterius Pope of Alexandria, that Dounaa, the King of the Homeritai, who was a Jew and practiced that faith, treacherously seized the low-lying town of Negran. Then in his folly he called upon all the inhabitants of that town to repudiate

our Lord Jesus Christ and to embrace (accept) the service of the Law. But when they all ignored his decree, the impious man became angered, and ordering a blazing fire to be kindled for a sufficient length of time, he reduced that vast populace to ashes and destroyed them. Certain of them, however, he dispatched by hanging (or strangling), and he had their chief men put to the sword. Among these was the aged (i.e. white-haired) and highly honored ethnarch whose name was Arethas and, after Dounaa had held many arguments with him, he killed this man, cutting off his venerable head with the sword. Finally, after he had sifted through everything there like dust, the accursed returned to his capital (kingdom, palace) and wrote to all the powers about him, especially to the King of Persia, to root out the Christians utterly from their kingdoms; they should do this, he said, 'Even as I have done'.

When Justin the King of the Romans (= Byzantines) learned of this, he wrote in haste to Elesboa, that most saintly King of Ethiopia, to muster the armies under his command and wage war against the lawless Jew and to exact punishment for the precious and innocent blood of those just men who had nobly suffered so for the undefiled faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. And indeed that reknowned King (Elesboa) did just that. He gathered all his forces and attacked him by land and sea, completely routing the transgressor's armies, and capturing the lawless Jew along with his relatives, and these he put to death by the sword.

Moreover, he conquered his Kingdom and all the outposts that were under his rule. And he took Tephra by storm, the reigning city of the Homeritai, and upon entering the city he plundered everything in his palace. Most of those in that place he killed out of fear, while the rest, both Jews and those of foreign nations, were terrified, and entreated him to receive the holy baptism. There was neither bishop nor priest there nor deacon nor any other from the clergy of the most holy church, for the enemy of the holy trinity, which exists in one and the same Being, had nearly destroyed everything, so that not even the memory of such people was found in the Kingdom. For, after exhuming the sacred remains of those who had died previously and had been covered by precious caskets, he reduced even these to ashes in the fire. Therefore, Elesboa, that most saintly king, wrote from the land of the Homeritai to Proterius, the pope of Alexandria, giving a detailed description of everything and of how the Lord God had guided him aright; and he wrote again for him to choose from all over his patriarchate someone wise, learned, sagacious and prudent, one carefully trained in both the Old and New Testaments, and to ordain him a bishop and send him along with all his equipment and an ecclesiastic entourage.

Gregentius' Voyage to the Land of the Homeritai

When they had been entertained and had rejoiced, Pope Proterius on that very day made arrangements for the future to send those who came from the king to him along with the blessed one. And when everything was in readiness the

pope gave to the saint everything he would need without hesitation, at the same time furnishing those who wished to travel with him, and embracing him sent them on their way in peace. Their sailing proved auspicious, and within a few days they reached Ethiopia. After stopping a little while in Amlem, the capital city of the Ethiopians and acquiring certain necessities which they had been advised by the court to get, they re-embarked and sailing for many days on the swift sea of Saba and crossing by the cave Daecoeon, they reached Tephra, the capital city of the Homeritai. They found the king not in the city of Tephra, but at that town where the transgressor Dounaa had killed the holy martyrs. He was razing the temples of idols of the cities there and destroying the idols of the remaining nations and was founding churches in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. He also built a church of surpassing beauty in Negran in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ of the life-giving resurrection; moreover, he built another one in Stadium, in the name of the holy mother of God, and another, in the name of the holy martyrs and the famous Aretha, near to his house, where earlier there had been a marvelous garden. Similarly he constructed in Tephra the great Church in the name of the holy Trinity near the palace where to live. Another he founded in the middle of Dana, which is called the square, in the name of the holy Mother of God, and another at the western gate of the city in the name of the holy apostles. And in the city of *Acana* he established three churches in the name of the Saviour of the Ascension and of John the Forerunner (the Baptist) and another for the apostle Thomas. By stationing his soldiers in the city of *Atarph* and the nearby cities and compelling the natives to work, and by appointing his officers overseers of the projects, he raised up (restored) churches everywhere. It is related that while he was still in Negran — he had just given a feast at which he ordained as ethnarch the son of the saintly Aretha — when this good news came to him.

“They have arrived, my master,” he said, “who were sent by your authority to Alexandria for a bishop, whom they have with them.”

When he heard this the king rejoiced greatly, and leaving his seat descended to meet the bishop; for that most pious and Christ-loving king was exceedingly humble, more so than anyone else of those who had ruled in Ethiopia before him.

Now when the king was in the court of the palace, those arriving with the blessed one pointed him out from afar, and as they neared one another that most holy bishop ran forward and embraced the pious king, blessing him. The King returned the greeting in the same manner to the holy one and taking him by the right hand mounted him to the place where he himself sat.

Now when the king had sat down upon his throne with the blessed one very near to him, those who had just arrived delivered the letter of Pope Proterius to the king and moreover his gifts which he had sent him.

And upon learning from his letter those things which concerned the blessed one, he rejoiced greatly and addressed that just man with respect, being filled with immeasurable happiness. For he understood that it was through an inspiration sent from God to him that he had chosen and appointed this man and had sent him, and that at his appointment great portents had appeared to him; praising them the Lord Most High for these things, he took the bishop and went to consecrate the churches which he had built to the Lord.

And after the august churches in the city of Negrān had been first consecrated by the holy Bishop Gregentius, the king took him and arrived in the city of Acana; and there too the divine Gregentius consecrated the churches, ordaining one priest to remain in each church and to carry out the consecration.

Then they went to Atephar and Legma, where they consecrated the divine temples and held a great feast. Afterwards they passed through all the cities thereabout, consecrating the sacred precincts. Upon their arrival at *Tephar*, the capital of the Homeritai, they rested for a few days and then proceeded with joy and good cheer to the venerable buildings in that place, and carried on in high spirits and feasting. Meanwhile the most revered King Elesboa was eager to return to his kingdom, for he had spent considerable time in the country of the Homeritai, about thirty-six months as some say.

The Holy King Elesboa and the Great Hierarch
(Arch-Priest) Gregentius Appoint Abraha the Blessed King

And so the king called together the blessed Gregentius and all of his chiefs and satraps, and when they had convened their council-meeting, with that most pious king and the most reverend archbishop presiding, the king addressed the Senate in these words: "What think you? Whom shall we annoint and leave behind in this palace as king?" But when they replied, "Master, there is none among us who is greater in wisdom than your Majesty," that most pious king turned to Saint Gregentius and said: "This is thy dark, honored lord and shepherd of us all. Behold, then, before thee are all the leaders and chief men, as well as the satraps, both great and small. Therefore, calling upon our Lord Jesus Christ, choose for thyself as king one from all of these — that one whom the Lord God will inspire thee to choose. And indeed all of us shall depart from here, but that one shall remain here with thee. Whomever thou shalt choose, therefore, be he evil or good, choose him from among their men."

Appendix B.

This is a recently discovered fresco in the monastery of St. Chrysostomos in Cyprus which represents Saint Gregentius. It is dated to the 11th century (see Cyril Mango in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*), and it shows that already at this period Saint Gregentius was known well enough to inspire a Cypriote artist.



Courtesy of the Dumbarton Oaks Field Committee.

NOTES

1. For the Himyarite-Ethiopian war of this period in general see C. Conti Rossini, "Expéditions et possessions des Habašât en Arabie" *Journal Asiatique*, 11^e série, 18 (Jul. 1921), pp. 5-36; A. A. Vasiliev, "Justin I (518-527) and Abyssinia" *Byz. Zeitschr.*, 33 (1933), pp. 67-77; N. Pigulevskaja, "Ethiopia and Himyar in their relations with the Eastern Roman Empire" *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* (1948), pp. 87-97 (in Russian), and "Primary sources of the Ethiopian-Himyarite War" *Viz. Vremennik*, 27 (1949), pp. 74-93 (in Russian); J. W. Hirschberg, *The Jews in Arabia from the Fall of the Second Temple until the Crusaders* (Tel-Aviv 1946), p. 75 ff. (in Modern Hebrew); Sidney Smith, "Events in Arabia in the Sixth Century" *BSOAS*, 15³ (1954), pp. 425-468; J. Ryckmans, *La persécution des chrétiens Himyarites au sixième siècle* (Istanbul, 1956); B. Rubin, *Das Zeitalter Justinians* (Berlin 1960), p. 297 ff.; A. G. Lundin, *South Arabia in the 6th Century*, *Palestinskiy Sbornik* 8, 71, (Moscow-Leningrad, 1961 — in Russian).

2. For the exact chronology of these events see J. Ryckmans, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22; and Sidney Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 464-465. See also A. F. I. Beeston "Problems of Sabaeen Chronology" *BSOAS*, 16 (1954), p. 40 ff. The chronological terminus chosen here, ca. 530 A.D., is rather arbitrary and roughly corresponds to the period during which the *Acts* of Gregentius take place.

3. The importance of the *Acts* of Gregentius was first revealed by A. A. Vasiliev in his article "The Life of St. Gregentius, Homerite Bishop" *Viz Vremennik*, 14 (1907 — in Russian), pp. 23-67. Vasiliev published in this article scattered passages from Gregentius' *Life* based only on one manuscript, the *Codex Sinait. Graec.* 437, in a rather careless edition accompanied by a Russian translation and a short general introduction.

A full discussion of manuscript tradition cannot be undertaken here. The most important manuscript are first the above mentioned of Sinai dated ca. 1150 A.D. and the *Codex Jerusal. Graec* (Stavrou-5) of the 14th century. See F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca* I (Brussels, 3rd ed. 1957), p. 228.

4. The *Laws* were edited by J. Fr. Boissonade in *Anecdota Graeca*, V (Paris) 1833), pp. 63-116; the *Dialogue* by Gulon (Paris, 1586); both works were re-edited in *P. G.* 86¹. col. 567-784.

5. *Codex Jerusal. Graec.* 179, N2.³

6. For the Greek version of the *Martyrium* see Boissonade, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-62. The Greek text and Latin translation with a commentary by E. Carpentier is found in *Acta Sanctorum*, X, October 24, pp. 721-759. See also another version in *Symeonis Metaphrastae Martyrium S. Arethae* in *P. G.* 1152, col. 1249-1290.

7. See for example Tor Andrae's remark in *Les origines de l'Islam et le christianisme*, transl. by Jules Roche (Paris, 1955), p. 23 "Pour un Gregentius, évêque — surtout orthodoxe — l'histoire de l'Eglise de l'Arabie du Sud n'a manifestement pas de place." In this case one could equally say "an orthodox Arethas, this is impossible" and dismiss the whole historical veracity of the *Martyrium* which is now considered by Andrae and most scholars to be of great historical value, simply because it presents the monophysite Arethas as stalwartly orthodox.

8. *Codex Sinait. Graec.* 437.

9. *Codex Athonian.* (Laura-276).

10. *Codex Athonian.* (Philoth.-1906).

11. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 434.

12. Axel Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites: Fragments of a Hitherto Unknown Syriac Work* (Lund, 1924).

13. For the text and an Italian translation see I Guidi, "La lettera di Simeone vescovo di Beth-Arsham sopra i martiri omeriti," in *Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei, Memorie della classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, 7 (Rome, 1881), pp. 471-518. For an English translation see Arthur Jeffery in *The Muslim World*, 37 (1946), pp. 204-216.

14. See note 6.

15. The Ethiopic text was edited and translated in Italian by Conti Rossini in *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei*, Ser. V, 19 (Rome, 1910), pp. 729-738 and 747-750. English translation in Jeffery, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-204.

16. For the *Laws* and the relevant problems see R. Dareste, "Lois des Homerites," *Nouvelle revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 29 (1905), pp. 157-170; A. D'Emilia, "Intorno oî νόμοι τῶν Ὁμηριτῶν in *Atti del Congr. internaz. di Diritto romano e di Storie del Diritto*, Verona, 1948 I (Milan, 1951), pp. 183-197; N. Pigulevskaja, "The Laws of the Himyarites" *Viz Vremennik*, III (1950), pp. 51-61 (in Russian); E. Patlagean, "Les Moines grecs d'Italie et l'apologie des thèses pontificales (VII^e-IX^e siècles) in *Studi Medievali* (1964), pp. 579-602.

Patlagean in her article correctly points out that the *Laws* should be examined in connection with the other parts of the *Acts* of Gregentius (*Life, Dialogue with a Jew*) and should not be treated as an autonomous literary work as some scholars had done. Patlagean herself however fails to examine the *Acts* of Gregentius in connection with the other sources, see p. 40 of the present paper.

The most recent author to consider the *Laws* as an authentic source is A. K. Irvine in his article "Homicide in Pre-Islamic South Arabia" *BSOAS*, 30² (1967), pp. 277-292. Irvine states unqualifiedly that the punishments described in the *Laws* are typically Arab. The present author is preparing an edition and English translation of the *Laws*.

17. For Christianity in South Arabia see J. Ryckmans, "Le christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique" in *L'Oriente cristiano nella storia della civiltà* (Accademia dei Lincei, Rome, 1964), pp. 413-454.

18. Moberg, *op. cit.* p. cii ff, and p. cix ff.

19. Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

20. Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

21. See Appendix A.

22. On the religion of the South Arabs, see G. Ryckmans, *Les religions Arabes préislamiques* (Louvain, 2nd ed. 1951).

23. We can now establish the precise time of the spread of Judaism in South Arabia. Several Himyarite inscriptions dating from the middle 4th century A.D. show Jewish inspiration. (See G. Ryckmans "Les inscriptions monotheistes sabéennes" in *Miscellanea historica in honorem Alberti de Meyer* (Louvain-Brussels, 1946), pp. 194-205). The Byzantine author Philostorgius, writing at this period, describes the efforts of the Byzantines to expand Christianity in South Arabia, and informs us that the Himyarites were primarily pagans although a number of Jews lived among them.

Hirschberg has contributed some valuable insights in his study of the penetration of Judaism in South Arabia (*op. cit.*, p. 50 ff, I owe the translation of this book to my student Shendar Judith Ayalon). Judaism entered South Arabia from Bahrayn on the Persian Gulf in north-west Arabia, a port frequented by many Jewish merchants. The second wave of Jews coming from Palestine penetrated first North Arabia and subsequently moved southwards allured by Yemen's reputation as a prosperous country. Hirschberg revealed the only inscription written by Himyarites in Greek. Found in Palestine, it was written by Jewish Himyarites who immigrated from South Arabia to Palestine where they learned the Greek language. The 3rd century B.C. date of this inscription points to a very early penetration of Judaism in South Arabia.

24. Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 37, Appendix A.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Martyrium* of Arethas (Codex Paris. N² 1483) P.G. 115 col. 1250 "θύοντας ἡλιῶ καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ δαίμοσιν..."

27. G. Ryckmans, *Les religions Arabes préislamiques* (Louvain, 1951), p. 44 ff.

28. *P.G.* 115, col. 1250.
29. See Appendix A.
30. There is an allusion only to this example of paganism in Moberg's *Book of the Himyarites*, *op. cit.*, p. lci, footnote 1.
31. Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 23 and the *Book of the Himyarites*, *op. cit.*, p. cxxxi.
33. Blood offering was a fundamental feature of Arab sacrifice. Muhammad's strict orders forbidding the drinking of blood confirm the existence of such a practice in pre-Islamic times. The influence of such pagan beliefs on the Christian Arabs is obviously manifested in the heresies of the so-called *Arrabitai* mentioned by the Byzantine church historians (see, for example, Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* VI, 37. They believed that the soul is part of the body, dies with it, and will be resurrected with it. These beliefs are more obviously manifested in Origen's *Dialogue with Heracleidas* where the heretics are said to believe that the soul of the body is blood, see J. Scherer. *Entretien d'Origene avec Heraclide* (Paris 1960).
34. Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Similar pagan survivals of blood rituals practiced by the pre-Islamic Southern Christian Arabs appear also in al-Mašūdi who mentions 'Ella-Aṣbeha's threat that he would shave Arethas's forehead and spill his blood and trample the Yemenite land. See *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. G. Barbier de Meynard et Pavet de Courteille, III (Paris. 1864), p. 157.
35. *P. G.* 86¹, col. 573.
36. *P. G.* 86,¹ col. 577.
37. For the geography of South Arabia see E. Glasser, *Skizze der Geschichte Arabiens v.d. ältesten Zeiten bis z. Propheten Mohammed* (München, 1889-90); A. Kammerer, *La Mer Rouge, l'Abyssinie et l'Arabie depuis l'antiquité. Essai d'histoire et de géographie historique* (Cairo, 1929); J. Werdecker, *A Contribution to the Geography and Cartography of Northwest Yemen* (Cairo, 1939); G. Fouquet. *Mer Rouge* (Paris, 1946); H. v. Wissman and M. Hofner, *Beiträge zur historischen Geographie des vorislamischen Südarabien. Akad. d. Wiss. und. d. Literatur. Abh. der Geistes- und sozialwiss. Kl.* 1952, 4; Wolfgang Aly, *Strabo von Amaseia* (Bonn, 1957), pp. 165-170; and Y. M. Kobishchanow, "On the Problem of Sea Voyages of Ancient Africans in the Indian Ocean," *Journal of African History*. 6² (1965), pp. 137-141.
38. Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
39. See Appendix A.
40. Compare with the analogical form *Homeridas* found in Pindar. *Nemean Odes* 2.1.
41. *P. G.* 82³, col. 1473.
42. See for example Marcianus' *Periplus*, *G.G.M.*, p. 527.
43. See the attached map, Appendix C.
44. *Cod. Theodos.* XII, 12, 2.
45. See for example P. Peeters, *Anal. Boll.* 31 (1912), p. 103.
46. W. F. Prideaux, "The Coins of the Axumite Dynasty," *Numismatic Chronicle*, 4 (1884), p. 210.
47. Wilfred H. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraen Sea* (London, 1912), p. 23.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.
49. See Appendix and attached map.
50. Mhwn (Arab. المهن) *Ry.* 507 and *Ry.* 508; J. Ryckmans, "Inscriptions historiques sabéennes de l'Arabie centrale," *Le Muséon*, 66 (1953), pp. 333-335.
51. See Appendix A.

52. Procopius, *Hist.* I, xix, 21.

53. The *Martyrium* of Arethas does not refer to any debarkation port in South Arabia although it mentions the harbor of Gabbaza adjoining Adulis as the port of departure for the Ethiopian army. (Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 49). Gabbaza appears as Abara in the Ethiopic version of the *Martyrium* of Arethas, no doubt due to the influence of the Arabic tradition in which غبر could easily be confused with عبر (See Fell, *op. cit.*, p. 156, note 3, and F. M. E. Pereira, *Historia dos Martyres de Nagra* (Lisbon, 1899), p. 156). Ishāq's account, as it is preserved in the versions by Ibn Hisām and Ṭabari says nothing about the landing places in South Arabia of the Ethiopian army, al-Mašūdi mentions the locations Nāsi' and Zeila' as the Abyssinian ports from where the Ethiopians departed and Gallāfiqah a town of Zabīd as their landing port in Yemen. (*Mašūdi. Murūj al-Dhahab, op. cit.*, p. 157).

من بلاد ناصع والزبلع وهو ساحل الحبشة على حسب ما ذكرنا
الى بلاد غلاقفة من ساحل زبيد ارض اليمن

54. See for example Codex Sinait. Graec. 437, fol. 60, and Codex Jerusalem (Stavrou-5), fol. 1.

55. Codex Athonien. (Karakalou, 1555), fol. 1.

56. P. G. 115, col. 1288.

57. Ry. 507, see J. Ryckmans, *La persécution des chrétiens Himyarites au sixième siècle*, *op. cit.*, p. 13. Ma'rīb was the capital of South Arabia until the middle of the third century A.D., when the capital was moved southwards Ṣafār. See N. Pigulevskaja, *Vizantia na putiakh b. Indiu* (Leningrad, 1951), p. 336 ff.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Ry. 508. 'Inscriptions historiques,' *op. cit.*, p. 333; Ibn Hishām in *Sirat Rasūl Allāh*, transl. by A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (London, 1955), p. 21. "Abraha built the cathedral (*al-Qullays*) in Ṣanā, such a church as could not be seen elsewhere in any part of the world at that time," and al-Maḡdisī *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-l-Ta' rikh*, ed. M. Cl. Huart (Paris, 1903), p. 185 ff."

فبنى كنيسة لم ير الناس مثله في شرفها

60. P. G. 86¹, col. 621.

61. E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine periods* (New York, 1900), p. 1097.

62. P. G. 86¹, col. 620(69). Similarly the synod which took place in Constantinople in 621 A.D. is known as *Trullan* because it was held in the Domed Hall. With great caution I can add to the list of these name-place identifications that of *Ophra* where, according to the *Acts* of Gregentius (P. G. 86^e, col. 572), the Ethiopian king 'Ella-Aṣbeha ended his life. Perhaps *Ophra* is an echo of 'Afar, an African name designating a tribe and their territory which stretched from the Red Sea across to Wadjerab. The origin of this people and the exact date of their appearance in this region is not known. See E. Chedeville, "Quelques faits de l'organisation sociale des 'Afar," *Africa*, 36 (1966), pp. 173-196.

63. Al-Hamdāni describes in detail the courtyards of the palaces of Yemen بيت خنبض in his eighth book *al-Iklīl*.

64. Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 2. For the tymological explanation of the names Asbeha and Abraha, see E. Ullendorf. "Note on the Introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia," *Africa* 19 (1949), pp. 61-62.

65. ECBAHA, W. F. Prideaux, "The Coins of the Axumite Dynasty," *Numismatic Chronicle* 4 (1884), p. 214.

66. Moberg, *op. cit.*, p. xlii.

66a. It is noteworthy that the *Cod. Athon. Dionys.* 183, fol. 93 a marginal note emphasizes the fact that Proterius was an orthodox patriarch. "ὁ δὲ ἦν ὁρθόδοξος."

67. This is the usual interpretation given to his name by the Arab authors. See for example, al-Maqqisī, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

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68. J. Ryckmans, "Inscriptions historiques Sabéenes," *op. cit.*, p. 331.

69. The name Kāleb appears in Greek transliteration only in the inscriptions of Ethiopian coins, see G. Schulberger, "Monnaies inédites des Ethiopiens et des Homerites," *Revue Archéologique* (1882), p. 360.

70. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 451.

71. Malalas, *Chronogr. C.S.H.B.*, 15, p. 423, 433 ff.

72. Theophanes *Chronogr. C.S.H.B.*, 41, p. 346.

73. For the text of Pseudo Dion. see Assemani *Bibl. Or.* I, 359-389. The same events have also been preserved and recorded in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian (See J. B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michael le Syrien II* (Paris, 1905), p. 183 ff.).

74. Otto A. Jager, *Antiquities of North Ethiopia* (Stuttgart, 1965), p. 92.

75. Theophanes, *Chronogr. op. cit.*, p. 260.

76. For the commercial activities of the Ethiopians in the Arabic Gulf at this period see Kobishchanow, *op. cit.*, p. 13 ff. See also R. S. Lobez, "The role of the trade in the economic readjustment of Byzantium in the VII^e century," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959), p. 76 ff.

77. See for example M. L. Duchesne, *The Churches separated from Rome*, trans. A. H. Mathem, (London, 1907), p. 210.

78. It is only in the past years that the situation has changed, see G. A. Lipsky, *Ethiopia* (New Haven, 1962), p. 102 ff. and L. Stan, "The Ethiopian Church," *Eccl. Pharos* Nr' (1917) p. 91 ff.

79. Michael the Syrian, II, *The Chronicle, op. cit.*, p. 184 ff.

80. Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 53 ff.

81. The name of this patriarch is not mentioned in the *Chronicle* of John bishop of Ephesus, as we learn from other sources it was Theodosius (535-538 A.D.). See Jean Maspero, *Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1923), p. 348.

82. *Bibl. or.* I, p. 383 ff.

83. See Appendix A.

84. This is the way in which Arethas' death appears in the illumination of the *Menologium of Basil II*. See V. Christides, "Pre-Islamic Arabs in Byzantine Illuminations," *Le Muséon* (Louvain, 1970), p. 172 ff.

85. ed. Wuestenfeld (Göttingen, 1858-59), p. 20.
86. A. Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
87. See for example al-Maqdisī, *op. cit.*, p. 182 ff.
88. For the various opinions voiced on this matter and a bibliography, but without any critical evaluation, see H. Paret, in *E.I.²*, vol. I, s.v. *Ukhdud*.
89. See Appendix A.
90. See Appendix A.
91. Conti Rossini, *RSO*, p. 744, Note 2.
92. Moberg, *op. cit.*, p. lvi.
93. R. S. Sergeant, "Ukhdoud", *BSOAS* 22 (1954), p. 572³.
94. Hašūdi. *op. cit.*, I, p. 129 ff.
95. A. Jeffery, "Christianity in South Arabia," *The Moslem World* 36 (1946), p. 203.
96. al-Maqdisī, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
97. Procopius, *Hist.*, I, xx, 1-2.
98. Moberg, *op. cit.*, p. cxxxvii ff.
99. *Ibid.*
100. See Appendix A.
101. See *P. G.* 86¹, col. 572 and appendix A.
102. See E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, I (Cambridge, 1937), p. 10 ff. for the description of Kāleb's activities and death, vol. III, p. 912 ff.
103. See the English translation in A. Jeffery, *op. cit.*, p. 202 ff. and J. W. Hirschberg, "Nestorian Sources of North-Arabian Traditions on the Establishment and Persecution of Christianity in Yemen," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 15 (1949), p. 342 ff.
104. Hirschberg, *op. cit.*, p. 329.
105. *Istanbul 7608 bis*, in this inscription which starts with an invocation of the Trinity the Hmyarite kings appear simply as prefects of the Ethiopian and they dedicate a building in obedience to their lords, the nagasat of Ethiopia. See G. Ryckmans, "Une inscription chrétienne Sazbéene aux Musées d'Antiquités d'Istanbul," *Le Muséon* 59 (1946), pp. 165-172, and Sidney Smith, 'Events in South Arabia in the 6th Century,' *BSOAS*, 15³ (1954), p. 432.
106. In the Greek sources Abraha is either conveniently transliterated *Abraam* according to the biblical name of the Patriarch *Abraham* (Septuagint) as in *P. G.* 86¹, col. 57 or more often is Graecized to *Abraas*.
107. Procopius, *Hist.*, I, xx, 1-9.
108. See for example A. Guillaume, *op. cit.*, p. 20 ff.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 21, "He (Abraha) sent to Murra b. dhu-Yazān and took away from him his wife Ruyhana b. Alqama b. Malik b. Zayd b. Kahlan ... Afterwards she bore to Abraha
137. C. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur von Justinian bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches* (527-1453), second edition (Munich, 1897), p. 59.
138. *Codex Athon. Vatop.* 92.