

in the area now known as Syria, is difficult to determine, but it seems fairly certain that while Greek was the dominant literary language in the region at that period the common people of native origin generally spoke Syriac. South of Syria, however, we find that the so-called Christian-Palestinian dialect was more or less in literary use down to the eleventh century,¹ while in the fifth and sixth centuries it was in such common use there and of such importance as to warrant a special translation of the Scriptures and Church manuals into the dialect.² It was in Mesopotamia, however, that Syriac was in widest use as a literary and as a colloquial language. It was from this area that Aramaic made such a profound impress on the Middle Persian language and literature,³ and there can be no doubt that from the Syriac used by the Christian portion of the community of al-Ḥīra and the surrounding districts came the major portion of Syriac influence upon Arabic.

It will be remembered that it was in this area that one of the earliest forms of Arabic script, the Kūfic, was invented, based apparently on a modification of the Syriac script,⁴ and it was from the same area that the system of vowel pointing in Arabic was developed from the old Nestorian system.⁵ Here also in the court of the kings of al-Ḥīra, the Christian 'Ibādites laid the foundation of Arabic literature,⁶ and it was in this area that Arab tribes such as Tamīm and Taghlib and Qudā'a seem first to have come under Christian influence,⁷ so that from here, along the trade routes, streams of Christian culture spread throughout Arabia.⁸

We are still in need of a critical discussion of the spread of Christianity in Arabia,⁹ but one fact seems certain, namely that such Christianity as was known among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times was

¹ The date when the scribe Ābūd copied the Lectionary published by Erizzo, *Evangelarium Hierosolymitanum*, Verona, 1861.

² Noldeke, *ZDMG*, xxii, 525, gives this as the date of the version. Since about A.D. 700 (Schulthess, *Grammatik*, p. 7), the language has been superseded as a colloquial by Arabic, and there are Arabicisms to be met with in the MSS. which were written by Arabic-speaking monks, cf. Noldeke, loc. cit., p. 523 n.

³ See Haug in *PPGL*, and *Essays*, p. 81; and Salemann in Geiger and Kuhn's *Grundriss*, i, 250.

⁴ Rothstein, *Lakhmiden*, 27; Moritz in *EI*, i, 383.

⁵ Moritz in *EI*, i, 384.

⁶ Nicholson, *Literary History*, 138.

⁷ Cheikho, *Naṣrāniya*, see Index under these names.

⁸ Nicholson, op. cit., 39.

⁹ The discussion has begun by Wright, *Early Christianity in Arabia*, 1855, and continued, though in an uncritical way, by Cheikho in his *Naṣrāniya*. The latest and best discussion, though by no means complete, is in Andrae's *Ursprung*, 1926.