

to assume that many of these words were borrowings of the Prophet himself, for in a city like Madīna, where Jewish influence was so strong and where there was apparently a keen interest in religious matters, it is probable that many such words would have been borrowed in pre-Islamic times, and as a matter of fact many such are to be found in the old poetry.¹

It is not impossible, of course, that Aramaic words may have entered from sources which were neither Syriac nor Jewish, but it is doubtful if any words of the genuine Nabataean dialect are to be found in the Qur'ān. A glance at as-Suyūṭī's list of so-called Nabataean words² gives one the impression that the philologists used the term

mainly as a cloak for their ignorance, نبطية being a good enough designation for any strange word whose origin they could not ascertain.³

(viii) *Coptic*.—as-Suyūṭī finds some six words which his authorities, Shaidhala, al-Wāsiṭī, and others, classed as Coptic loan words.⁴ It hardly needs saying that none of them are Coptic, and indeed in the case of some of them one wonders why anyone ever thought of considering them other than Arabic. Coptic was the liturgical language of the Christian communities of Egypt at the time of Muḥammad, as indeed it has remained to the present day. How much more than a liturgical language it was is doubtful, though we have reason to believe that the cultural language, if not the language of everyday life in Egypt at that period, was Greek.⁵ It is practically certain that Greek would have been the language of commerce, and we may well doubt whether any Coptic vocabulary would have entered Arabic along the trade routes.⁶ It is a remarkable fact that the colloquial Arabic of Egypt which grew up after the Muslim conquest of the country, while it is full of Greek loan words contains but few words derived from Coptic.

That Muḥammad himself had at least one point of intimate contact

¹ The classical discussion of this element in Arabic vocabulary is Fraenkel's *Aramäische Fremdwörter im Arabischen*, Leiden, 1886.

² *Mutaw*, 59–62.

³ So Dvořák, *Fremdw*, 21, 22.

⁴ *Mutaw*, pp. 62–4.

⁵ Burkitt, *JThS*, xxvii, 148 ff. suggests that Coptic was perhaps never much more than a liturgical language.

⁶ Evidence of early contact with Mecca may be seen in the story of Coptic workmen having been employed in the rebuilding of the Ka'ba.