

This S. Arabian language, or language group, as revealed to us from the inscriptions of the Minaean, Sabaeen, Himyaritic, and other kingdoms, belongs to the S. Semitic group, and is closely related to Ethiopic, the classical language of Abyssinia. The latest inscriptions in the language date from A.D. 550, and the language would seem to have been supplanted by Arabic as a spoken language in those regions,¹ even before the time of Muḥammad, though the survival to the present day of the Mahri and Soqōṭri² dialects would seem to indicate that in odd corners this old language might have survived until quite a late period. With the break-up of the S. Arabian kingdom tribes of these peoples migrated to other areas of Arabia, so that at the commencement of the Islamic period we find them widely scattered over the peninsula.³ Though when we meet them there they are using the N. Arabian dialects of the tribes among whom they dwelt,⁴ there can be no doubt that words of S. Arabian origin could have found their way into Arabic from these scattered communities.

When we examine the words which the philologists class as *Indian*,⁵ we find, however, that none of them are real S. Arabian words. They are merely words which the early authorities could not explain, and

had to refer to some remote origin, and so for them *الهند* might quite well have meant the distant land of India, with which the Muslim conquests in the East had made them vaguely familiar.

(v) *Syriac*.—This is undoubtedly the most copious source of Qur'ānic borrowings. Syriac, which still survives to-day as a liturgical language and as the dialect of a few communities of Oriental Christians in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Persia, was at that time the spoken language of those Christian communities best known to the Arabs.⁶ How widely Syriac was spoken at the time of Muḥammad

¹ Nicholson, *Literary History*, p. 6.

² Cf. D. H. Müller, *Die Mehri und Soqōṭri-Sprache*, Wien, 1902-5.

³ Vide Blau, "Die Wanderung der sabäischen Völkerstämme," *ZDMG*, xxii (1868), p. 651 ff.

⁴ This fact has been forgotten by Taha Ḥusain in his essay on the pre-Islamic poetry, where he argues against the genuineness of some of the old poetry on the ground that while the poet was of a South Arabian tribe his language is North Arabic, and not one of the South Arabian dialects.

⁵ Cf. the list in as-Suyūṭi, *Mutaw*, 51, 52.

⁶ For the purposes of this Essay, Syriac = Christian Aramaic, and thus includes the Christian-Palestinian dialect and the Aramaic dialect of the Christian population of N. Syria as well as the Classical Syriac dialect of Edessa, which is the one best known to us from the literature and commonly usurps to itself the title of Syriac.