

also be borne in mind that during the Axumite occupation of S. Arabia many Ethiopic words of cultural significance may have come into current use in Arabia through commercial and political intercourse.¹

(ii) *Persian*.—The contacts between Arabia and the Sasanian Empire of Persia were very close in the period immediately preceding Islam. The Arab Kingdom centring in al-Ḥīra on the Euphrates had long been under Persian influence and was a prime centre for the diffusion of Iranian culture among the Arabs,² and in the ḡitanic struggle between the Sasanian and Byzantine Empires, where al-Ḥīra had been set against the kingdom of Ghassān, other Arab tribes became involved and naturally came under the cultural influence of Persia.³ The court of the Lakhmids at al-Ḥīra was in pre-Islamic times a famous centre of literary activity. The Christian poet 'Adī b. Zaid lived long at this court, as did the almost-Christian al-A'shā, and their poems are full of Persian words.⁴ Other poets also, such as Ṭarafa and his uncle Mutalammis, Al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza, 'Amr b. Kulthūm, etc., had more or less connection with al-Ḥīra,⁵ while in some accounts we find 'Abīd b. al-Abrāṣ and others there. There is some evidence to suggest that it was from al-Ḥīra that the art of writing spread to the rest of the Arabian peninsula.⁶ But not only along the Mesopotamian area was Persian influence felt. It was a Persian general and Persian influence which overthrew the Abyssinian suzerainty in S. Arabia during Muḥammad's lifetime,⁷ and there is even a suspicion of Persian influence in Mecca itself. How far Persian cultural influence penetrated the peninsula we have little means of telling, but it will be remembered that one of Muḥammad's rivals was

¹ It has been noted by more than one scholar that the terms connected with sea-faring and sea-borne trade seem to be greatly influenced by Ethiopic. Andrac, *l'rsprung*, 15, speaking of this Axumite occupation says: "Mit den neuen Herrschern kamen aber sicher auch Geistliche herüber, und wir dürfen annehmen, dass eine grosse Zahl der äthiopischen Lehnwörter als Bezeichnung für kultische und religiöse Dinge, die uns im Koran begegnen, während dieser Periode ihren Weg in den arabischen Sprachschatz gefunden haben."

² Rothstein, *Die Dynastie der Lakhmiden in al-Ḥīra*, *passim*, and Siddiqi, 76.

³ We even hear of Arabs in that region becoming Zoroastrians, *vide* note on اسبذی in Siddiqi, 79.

⁴ Ibn Qutaiba, *Shi'r*, 136 f. Siddiqi, 82 ff., gives examples from other poets showing how great was the Persian influence on the poetry of that period.

⁵ Nicholson, *Literary History*, p. 107, and Shanqīṭi's introduction to the *Mu'allagāt*, Cairo, 1338.

⁶ Rothstein, *Lakhmiden*, 27.

⁷ at-Ṭabari, *Annales*, i, 948 ff.; Ibn Hishām, 41-6; Ḥamza, *Annales*, 139; and see Spiegel, *Eranische Altertumskunde*, iii, 454.