

inscriptions, being grouped together as South Semitic as opposed to the North Semitic group. The modern Abyssinian languages, and particularly Amharic, have in some respects diverged very considerably from the ancient Ge'ez, but it was presumably this ancient language with which the Arabs were in contact in pre-Islamic days and during Muḥammad's lifetime. These contacts, as a matter of fact, were fairly close. For some time previous to the birth of Muḥammad the southern portion of Arabia had been under Abyssinian rule,¹ and tradition relates that Muḥammad was born in the Year of the Elephant, when Mecca was saved from the Abyssinian army which marched up under Abraha to destroy the city. It is practically certain that there were trade relations between Abyssinia and Arabia at a much earlier period than the Axumite occupation of Yemen,² and that friendly relations continued in spite of the Year of the Elephant is clear from the fact that Muḥammad is said to have sent his persecuted followers to seek refuge in Abyssinia,³ and that the Meccan merchants employed a body of mercenary Abyssinian troops.⁴

That Muḥammad himself had personal contact with people who spoke *لسان الحبشة* seems to be indicated from the fact that tradition tells us that his first nurse was an Abyssinian woman, Umm Aiman,⁵ that the man he chose as first Muezzin in Islam was Bilāl al-Ḥabashī, and the tradition already noted that the Prophet was particularly skilled in the Ethiopic language.⁶

Abyssinian slaves appear to have been not uncommon in Mecca after the rout of the famous army of the Elephant,⁷ and it would not have been difficult for Muḥammad in his boyhood to have learned many words of religious significance from such sources.⁸ It must

¹ at Ṭabarī, *Annales*, i, 926 ff.; Ibn Hishām, 25 ff.; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murāj*, iii, 157, and see particularly Noldeke's *Sasaniden*, 186 ff.

² *Et*, i, 119, and Lammens, *La Mecque*, 281 ff.

³ This was in A.D. 616, and is known as the First Hijra, cf. at Ṭabarī, *Annales*, i, 1181. Dvořák, *Fremde*, 25, would derive some of the Ethiopic elements in the Qur'ān from the two Abyssinian migrations, but this is hardly likely.

⁴ Lammens, "Les Ahābiṣh," in *JA*, xi^e ser., vol. viii, 1916, p. 425 ff.

⁵ Abū'l-Fidā, *Vita Mohammedis*, p. 2, an-Nawawī, 756.

⁶ *Infra*, p. 8. al-Khafājī, 111, under سنة gives an example of the Prophet's use of Ethiopic.

⁷ Azrakī, p. 97. See also Essay I in Lammens' *L'Arabie occidentale avant l'Hégire*, Beyrouth, 1928.

⁸ Sprenger, *Moh. und der Koran*, p. 54, suggests that the mentor referred to in Sūra, xvi, 105, xxv, 5, 6, may have been an Abyssinian.