

Greek, and that when the word **يُونَانِيَّة** is used we are to understand the ancient Classical Greek, whereas in contradistinction to this **رومية** stands for Byzantine Greek. When, however, we come to examine the words which are said by as-Suyūṭī's authorities to be either **رومية** or **يُونَانِيَّة** we find that these authorities have no understanding whatever of the matter, and it seems in the last degree unlikely that any of them would have known the distinction between the two forms of Greek.¹

Any direct contact with the Greek language at the time of Muḥammad or the period immediately preceding his birth, would necessarily have been with Byzantine Greek. At that time Byzantine influence was supreme in Syria and Palestine, and the Arab confederacy of Ghassān, which acted as a buffer state between the Byzantine Empire and the desert tribes, and was used as an offset to the Persian influence at al-Ḥīra, was a channel whereby Byzantine influence touched the Arabs at many points.² Intercourse with Constantinople was constant, and both the pre-Islamic poet Imrū'ul-Qais,³ and the Ḥanīf 'Uthmān b. al-Ḥuwairith⁴ are said to have visited the Byzantine court. Contact with Christian communities in Syria which used the Greek language was a channel for the introduction of Greek words, and some trade words may have come as a result of Greek commercial ventures along the Red Sea littoral,⁵ as we learn from the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*,⁶ that Arab captains and crews were employed in this trade.

Byzantine Greek as a spoken language was doubtless widely spread in Palestine and Syria at the time, and the presumption is that it would be not unfamiliar to many Arabs connected more or less closely

¹ But see Jāhīz, *Three Essays*, ed. Finkel, pp. 16, 17.

² Noldeke, *Ghassanischen Fürsten*, p. 12 ff. Note also the Greek words occurring in the Nabataean inscriptions, e.g. **אופרנס** = *εὐφρόνιος*; **אסרתנא** = *στρατηγός*; **סקלטינא** = *συγκλητικός*; **הפרכיה** = *ἐπαρχεία*, etc. (on all of which see Cook, *Glossary*), and the number of Greek words in the Palestinian Talmud (cf. S. Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud*, Berlin, 1899).

³ Rückert, *Amrīkais der Dichter und König*, 94 ff.; Shanqīṭī, p. 9; Nicholson, *Literary History*, 104.

⁴ Ibn Hishām, 144; and see Caetani, *Annali*, i, p. 190.

⁵ Thus there is reason to believe that the Ar. **فلك** is from *ἐφόλκιον*; cf. Vollers in *ZDMG*, li, 300, 325.

⁶ In C. Müller, *Geogr. Graec. Min.*, i, 271.