

Al-Ḥabasha in Miṣr and the End of the World: Early Islamic Egyptian Apocalypse Narratives Related to Abyssinia

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the representation of al-Ḥabasha (Abyssinia) in the apocalyptic texts written in early Islam and the importance of Egyptian scholars in the transmission of this material. The historical background of this literature and the political context of its writing shows a strong Yemeni influence, related to the struggle between the kingdoms of Ḥimyar and Axum in the sixth century CE. One could ask if Muslim scholars from Fustat, the new Islamic capital of Egypt, enacted a “collective memory” by borrowing apocalyptic material from Christian literature, as well as fragments from the pre-Islamic history of Yemen.

Islamic narrative sources report little information on the relationship between Egypt and Abyssinia—called al-Ḥabasha in Arabic sources—in early Islam.¹ According to the oldest Egyptian source, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa akhbāruhā*, written by Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257 AH/871 CE), the Umayyad governor of Egypt, Maslama b. Mukhallad al-Anṣārī (47 AH/668 CE–62 AH/682 CE) sent an embassy to the master of Abyssinia (*ṣāḥib al-Ḥabasha*),² whereas al-Kindī (d. 350 AH/961 CE), in his *History of Governors of Egypt*, tells of

an Egyptian expedition in Abyssinia in 150 AH/767 CE against a Muslim Kharijite group.³ The topographical literature of Egypt, called *al-Ḥiṭat*,⁴ adds more information: al-Maqrīzī (d. 845 AH/1442 CE), according to al-Quḍāī (d. 454 AH/1063 CE), mentions Abyssinian elements in the army of ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ who conquered Egypt in 20 AH/641 CE.⁵ The presence of Abyssinians at the beginning of Islamic rule in Egypt seems confirmed by the toponymy of the new city of al-Fuṣṭāṭ: in the southeast, a pond was called *Birkat al-Ḥabash* (the Pond of the Abyssinians) by the newcomers, which is a serious indication of Abyssinian groups living in the new capital of Egypt.⁶

As we can see, the presence of Abyssinia in early Islamic Egypt is discreet in Egyptian narrative sources, which does not necessarily mean that it was weak. However, Abyssinia is present in another type of source, which could most be the oldest narratives written in Islam: the Apocalypse,⁷ known in Arabic as *al-malāḥim wa al-fitan*. The context of this literature is deeply connected with the wars between Islam and Byzantium in the first AH/seventh century CE,⁸ and these Islamic traditions are, as many scholars have shown, deeply influenced by other apocalyptic traditions, especially Jewish and Christian ones.⁹ The oldest books on Apocalypse were written in Egypt at the beginning of the third AH/ninth century CE in Fuṣṭāṭ. The first one is a scroll of papyrus called *Ṣaḥīfat ‘Abd Allāh b. Lahī‘a* by its editor.¹⁰ In fact, the author was not ‘Abd Allāh, a famous *cadi* and scholar from Fuṣṭāṭ (second AH/eighth century CE), but rather a pupil of ‘Uthmān b. Ṣāliḥ (d. 219 AH/834 CE), who was a disciple of Ibn Lahī‘a. The second book, which is more famous, is the *Kitāb al-fitan*, written by Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād (d. 228 AH/843 CE).¹¹ Even if Ḥammād was from Marw, Khurāsān, he spent the last forty years of his life in Fuṣṭāṭ, where he wrote his book,¹² and one can easily find the Egyptian influence on his work.

In these texts, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (d. 65 AH/685 CE) appears as the main Egyptian authority regarding apocalyptic narratives. Some historians mention that, on the day of the Yarmūk battle,¹³ ‘Abd Allāh found a scroll containing a number of apocalyptic narratives written by Jewish and Christian people (*ahl al-kitāb*).¹⁴ Others assert that he knew Syriac,¹⁵ which allowed him to read the Bible,¹⁶ but especially apocalyptic books, in particular the Book of Daniel.¹⁷ The latter is known as the writer of an important book containing apocalyptic revelations,¹⁸ which exerted influence

on some traditions that were written about by ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr and related to Abyssinia. In Islamic apocalyptic texts written in Fustāṭ, two references to Abyssinia and Abyssinians as apocalyptic actors in Egypt are to be found, all transmitted by ‘Abd Allāh. The first narrative describes the Abyssinian expedition against Egypt at a stage of what David Cook calls Christians counterinvasions¹⁹:

عبد الله بن عمرو بن العاص: تقتتلون بوسيم فيأتيكم مددكم من الشام فإذا نزل أولهم هزم الله عدوكم ولا تزالون تقاتلونهم إلى لوبية ثم ترجعون ثم تأتيكم الحبشة في ثلاثة آلاف سفينة عليهم أسيس فتقاتلونهم أنتم وأهل الشام²⁰

[‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ: You will fight in Wasīm (in the Delta), and your reinforcement will arrive from Syria. When the first of them will come down [in the battlefield], God will beat your enemy. You will continue to fight them until Libya, and then you return and the Ḥabasha will attack you on 3,000 boats commanded by Asīs. Then, you and the Syrians will fight them.]

The battle of Wasīm is described as opposing Muslims to the Andalusians (i.e., the Spanish); another report states that the Abyssinian expedition will happen a year after the Andalusian.²¹ The Abyssinian expedition is described as a huge army (3,000 boats), commanded by Asīs, who is identified by Khoury as the Biblical prophet Isaiah,²² known for his messianic predictions. The biblical character of this Islamic narrative is clear, especially because in the Bible, Isaiah evokes in his prediction Abyssinian messengers sent on board ship and going back up the river (probably the Nile).²³

The second narrative gives more details about the Abyssinian expedition against Egypt:

خرج وردان من عند مسلمة بن مخلد و هو أمير على مصر فمرّ على عبد الله بن عمرو مستعجلا فناداه: أين تريد يا أبا عبيد؟ قال: أرسلني مسلمة أن آتي منف فأحفر له عن كنز فرعون. قال: فارجع إليه و اقرأه مني السلام و قل له أن كنز فرعون ليس لك و لا لأصحابك إنما هو للحبشة إنهم يأتون في سفنهم يريدون القسطا فيسيرون حتى ينزلوا منف فيظهر لهم كنز فرعون فيأخذون منه ما يشاءون فيقولون ما نبتغي غنيمة أفضل من هذه فيرجعون و يخرج المسلمون في آثارهم فيدركونهم فيقتتلون فتتهزم الحبش فيقتلهم المسلمون و يأسرونهم حتى أن الحبشي ليباع بالكساء²⁴.

[Wardān [the finance director of Egypt] went out Maslama b. Mukhallad the governor. In a hurry, he met ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr who asked him: where do you go, Abū ‘Ubayd? He answered: Maslama sent me to Manf (Memphis) to dig in search of Pharaoh’s treasure. [‘Abd Allāh] said: Then come back to him and greet him on my behalf, and say to him that Pharaoh’s treasure is neither for him, nor for his companions, but it is for the Abyssinians who will come on their boats to seize Fustāt. They will arrive at Manf and it is there that Pharaoh’s treasure will appear to them. They will say: We shall not want better booty. They will come back, and Muslims will follow them and fight them. The Abyssinians will be defeated and Muslims will kill them and capture them to such an extent that the Abyssinian will be sold for a dress.]

This narrative is a mixture of Biblical (from the Book of Daniel) and Islamic Apocalypses. The episode of the Nubians in Egypt as invaders, raiding and pillaging cities and villages and searching the Pharaoh’s treasure is well described in the fourteenth vision of Daniel, called “Abyssinian invasions.”²⁵ The novelty lies in the mention of Fustāt, of the battle between Muslims and Abyssinians and, of course, in the substitution of the Abyssinians to the Nubians.

David Cook sensibly wonders whether the Abyssinians in the Muslim text are the same as the Nubians in the Christian one. His conclusion is that this tradition rests on a treasure-seeking expedition, considering the lack of religious overtones, and has most likely no historical ground.²⁶ David Cook’s analysis is attractive. It has also the merit of exposing this narrative for the first time, of connecting it with Christian apocalyptic tradition and of asking the question of the differences between both versions. Nevertheless, another interpretation can be put forward. First, it is normal that the narrative changes from Christian to Muslim perspective. The purpose of Muslim tradition is to show the danger represented by the Abyssinians, described as an army assaulting Fustāt on boat, and the final victory of the Muslims. Second, and more important, Nubians at that time (the second half of the first AH/seventh century CE) had already sealed a pact with Muslims, known as the *Baqt*.²⁷ Egyptian Muslim sources indicate that the pact was concluded after the battle of Dongola in 31 AH/652 CE.²⁸ One can suppose that the

replacement of the Nubians by the Abyssinians in the above-mentioned tradition is a consequence of this pact, because Nubians were no longer enemies of Muslims. This is confirmed by another apocalyptic narrative related to the ruin of Egypt at the end of the world, showing the principal dangers that threaten Egypt:

تهلك مصر إذا رُميت بالقسيّ الأربع: قوس الترك، وقوس الروم، وقوس الحبشة، وقوس أهل الأندلس.

[Egypt will collapse if the four bows attack it: the bow of the Turks, the bow of the Romans (Byzantines), the bow of the Abyssinians and the bow of the Andalusians.]²⁹

Having made peace with the Christian kingdom of Nubia, the danger of a “Christian” attack from the south could come only from the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia. Another reason for understanding the representation of Abyssinia in early Muslim sources: the episode of the Abyssinian attack on Mecca in the middle of the sixth century CE, called in Muslim tradition “*ām al-fil*” (year of the elephant), and described in the Qur’an in the Elephant *sūrah*.³⁰ This event took place in the sixth century CE when Abraha, king of Arabia,³¹ attacked the Arabian city of Mecca and tried to destroy the temple of al-Ka’ba.³² According to the Muslim tradition, this event is placed in 570 CE. Its date is not certain, however, because Abraha took the power in South Arabia in 530 CE. But it could be a symbolic date because the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad is placed on the same year by the Muslim tradition.³³ It is likely that the event is to be put in connection with the Abyssinian invasion of the Yemen in 527 CE and the destruction of Ḍafār, the Ḥimyarite capital.³⁴ One may wonder if this event (the tentative of destruction of al-Ka’ba) lies at the origin of the Abyssinians’ image as destructive and invasive people.³⁵

Another interpretation of the invader image attributed to the Abyssinians is possible. Going back in time, in the third century CE, one can note the struggle between the kingdom of Axum and the Arabian kingdoms of Yemen for the control of trade in the Red Sea. Some inscriptions evoke the conflict among Axum, Ḥimyar, and Saba’, from 220 to 270 CE, which led to the occupation of a large part of Yemen by the Abyssinians.³⁶ In the fourth

century CE, the unification of Yemen under the kingdom of Ḥimyar, by the annexation of the Saba' and Ḥaḍramawt kingdoms, offered a stable political context for its maritime and commercial development. But Ḥimyar suffered a lot from the competition of Adoulis, the main port of the Abyssinian kingdom.³⁷ In the beginning of the sixth century CE, South Arabia was conquered again by Axum and some sources point out religious motivations, especially the protection of Christian communities in Arabia who suffered a massacre by the Ḥimyarite Jews, better known as the massacre of Najrān.³⁸ According to the *Acts of Gregentius*, which received an excellent analysis from by Vasilios Christides, Abyssinians are described as brutal and cruel.³⁹

Abyssinia appears in most Syriac and Byzantine apocalyptic traditions, written shortly before the founding of Islam.⁴⁰ In the imagination of the time, Abyssinia and its people were an essential link in the conception of the end of the world. One could therefore wonder how deep connection between the events in sixth-century CE Arabia and the apocalyptic narratives of early Islam. The Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, written in the late seventh century CE,⁴¹ includes some interesting narratives to information given by Muslim apocalypses. Some scholars have shown the influence of this apocalypse on the writing of the *Kebrā Nagast* (The Glory of the Kings), an apocryphal Abyssinian text, a great compilation of legends and traditions to glorify Caleb.⁴² On the other hand, the writing of the apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius is deeply connected to the coming of Islam and its expansion in the Near East.⁴³

An old Muslim source, written at the beginning of the third AH/ninth century CE, gives a better idea of the Abyssinians' image in Yemeni memory.⁴⁴ The text is supposed to have been written by Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 725 or 737 CE), a scholar and *cadī* of Ṣan'ā' in the Umayyad period. Wahb was a specialist and transmitter of *Isrā'īliyyāt*, the Biblical traditions about prophets.⁴⁵ In the *Tījān*, Wahb gives interesting information about the royalty of Ḥimyar, son of Saba'. He relates that the Ḥabasha, sons of Kūsh b. Ḥām,⁴⁶ went back up the Nile to ruin Egypt, and that Ḥimyar faced them in Middle Egypt and finally beat them.⁴⁷ This information looks like that reported in Muslim Apocalypses, and one wonders if a Yemeni tradition circulated earlier in Egypt and influenced apocalyptic narratives.⁴⁸

We also need to remember some of the battles between Muslims and

Abyssinians in the early decades of Islam. According to al-Wāqidi (d. 822 CE), Shu‘ayba, a small port on the Red Sea, was assaulted by Abyssinian boats in 9 AH/630 CE. A contingent of 300 Muslims ran to defend the port and would have even pursued the Abyssinians at sea.⁴⁹ Some similarities between this narrative and the apocalyptic tradition of the Abyssinian invasion can be observed: an Abyssinian invasion by sea, the number of three (300, 3,000), and the pursuit of Abyssinians by Muslims. The scenario was repeated in 83 AH/702 CE when Abyssinian ships assaulted Jeddah, on the Red Sea. The attack was repelled and the Abyssinians were pursued at sea by a Muslim fleet.⁵⁰ The link between historical events in early Islam (e.g., the struggle between the nascent Islamic power and the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia) and the apocalyptic narratives transmitted by earlier scholars like ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr seems clear. One may wonder if early scholars such as ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr did not add to the apocalyptic heritage (from Christian and Jewish traditions) a historical base influenced by the first contact between the two powers. In this context, a question remains unanswerable: Islamic tradition draws a positive image of the Abyssinian king, al-Najāshī (the Negus) due to his reception of Muslim refugees sent by Muḥammad from Mecca to Axūm.⁵¹

As seen above, the image of Abyssinia in early Islamic apocalyptic narratives was influenced by other apocalyptic traditions of the late ancient Near East. Written in Syriac, Greek, and Coptic, these literatures “may serve as a kind of barometer for measuring the eschatological pressure at a given time in history since apocalypses are written to provide comfort in time of tribulation.”⁵² Most of the apocalyptic material used by Muslim scholars was borrowed from the intellectual sphere of Near Eastern cultures. In the latter, Abyssinians were a main crux in the perception of the end of the world.

Nevertheless, the Islamic tradition seems to have drawn some references from the recent past of the Arabic Peninsula, and the struggle between the kingdoms of Ḥimyar (in Yemen) and Axūm. The most important transmitters of apocalyptic material in early Islamic Egypt were the Yemeni: they acted as agents of a “collective memory”⁵³ that was probably written at the end of the Umayyad period in the book of Wahb, *al-Tijān fi mulūk Ḥimyar*. One can assume the establishment of a triangular network of historical traditions among Abyssinia, South Arabia, and Egypt. It is surprising that the Christian kingdom of Nubia is completely omitted from this early network dominated

by the apocalyptic tradition: one may wonder if the “Yemeni” character of this tradition, combined with the “peace” achieved between Muslims and Nubians, was the crucial element in the absence of Nubia in early Muslim apocalyptic narratives.

The presence of Yemeni scholars in Fustāt seems to have played an important role in the writing of the first Muslim books regarding the Apocalypse: the *Ṣaḥīfa* of Ibn Lahī’a and *al-Fitan* of Nu’aym b. Ḥammād. The latter clearly chose to settle in Egypt due to the existence of such knowledge, both oral and written.⁵⁴ The early interest of Egyptian scholars in the Apocalypse is confirmed by a note related to Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb (d. 128 AH/745 CE), considered as the most important Egyptian authority in his time. It asserts that before Yazīd undertook studies and reflection on legal matters (*al-‘ilm wa al-kalām fi al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām*), Egyptian scholars were solely versed in the Apocalypse (*al-malāḥim wa al-fitan*).⁵⁵ Exhaustive investigation on the scholarship milieu of Fustāt in the first century of Islam would enlighten our reading (and probably translations) of ancient masterpieces of apocalyptic literature,⁵⁶ the composition of an Islamic tradition in this genre, along with—and which would be even more interesting—the writing of a history of the glory of pre-Islamic Yemen in the capital of Islamic Egypt.⁵⁷

NOTES

1. Edward Ullendorff, “Ḥabash, Ḥabasha,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Brill, Leiden (1986), 3:3. See also Joseph Cuoq, *L’Islam en Ethiopie, des origines au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1981), 6. The term “Ḥabash,” used by Muslim historians and geographers, refers specifically to the population of Abyssinia. They often add the term for “land” to speak about the country, *arḍ al-Ḥabasha*. One can note the elasticity of the term “Ethiopia,” used by historians to define the lands from south Egypt to the Horn of Africa, including Nubia. On these questions, see especially Robin Seignobos, “L’autre Éthiopie: la Nubie et la croisade (XIIe–XIVe siècle),” *Annales d’Éthiopie* 27 (2012): 49–50.
2. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa akhbāruha*, ed. Ch. Torrey. The Yale Oriental Series Researches 3. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1923), 286.
3. Muḥammad b. Yūsuf Al-Kindī, *al-Wulāt wa al-quḍāt*, ed. R. Guest. Gibb

- Memorial Series 19 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1912), 116.
4. On this literature, see Sobhi Bouderbala, "L'histoire topographique: un genre littéraire spécifique aux lettrés égyptiens (IIIe/IXe–IXe/XVe siècle)," *Annales islamologiques* 45 (2011): 167–88.
 5. Aḥmad b. 'Alī Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa al-i'tibār fi dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa al-āthār*, ed. A. F. Sayyid (London: Dār al-Furqān, 2002–2004), 1:561. This information concerns the settlement of military groups in al-Jiza, on the Western bank of the Nile, among which al-Ḥabasha. One can note that the oldest Islamic source of Egypt says nothing about an Ethiopian presence in the conquest army: Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 129.
 6. On Birkat al-Ḥabash, see Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 3:510–15. With the exception of Ibn Yūnus, Egyptian historians did not give any explanation of that toponym and never connect it to Ethiopian groups living at Fuṣṭāṭ. Ibn Yūnus tries to identify the pond with a certain Qatāda b. Qays b. Ḥabashī, who had a farm nearby. Ibn Yūnus says that people linked Ḥabashī to Ḥabash: see 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sa'īd Ibn Yūnus, *Tārīkh Ibn Yūnus*, ed. A. F. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), 1:399. This explanation seems to be an attempt to Arabize the toponym, rather than the historical reality. Ibn Duqmāq and al-Maqrīzī, according to al-Quḍā'ī, say that the pond was first known as the Pond of al-Ma'āfir and Ḥimyar (two Yemeni tribes who settled near the pond), and afterwards as the cowshed of the sugar cane, created by the Umayyad governor Qurra b. Sharīk (90 AH/709 CE–95 AH/715 CE). It was after many years (al-Quḍā'ī did not say exactly when) that it acquired the name Pond of Ethiopians. See Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Aydamur Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Intiṣār li wāsiṭat 'iqd alamṣār*, ed. Karl Vollers (Cairo, Egypt: Bibliothèque Khédivale, 1893), 4:55; Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 3:511.
 7. On Muslim Apocalyptic, see David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2002), especially Chapter 1, *Historical Apocalyptic*, 34–91.
 8. Suliman Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources," *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* (series 3) 1/2 (1991): 173–74.
 9. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 2–10.
 10. Raïf-George Khoury, *Abd Allāh b. Lahī'a (97–174/715–790): juge et grand maître de l'école égyptienne, avec édition critique du l'unique rouleau de papyrus arabe*

- conservé à Heidelberg* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 243. The editor considers the scroll to be covering diverse topics, and is a collection of *hadīth*, including the theme of the Apocalypse (211). Nevertheless, an accurate reading of the papyrus, compared with the narrative material found in other books on the Apocalypse, shows that it has a single subject: *al-fitan* in its largest sense (civil war, apocalypse).
11. Nu‘aym al-Marwazī Ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-fitan*, ed. A. Zahīrī (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al-Tawhīd, 1991), 25–29; and David Cook, ed. and trans., “*The Book of Tribulations*”: *The Syrian Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition by Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād al-Marwazī* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), esp. the introduction.
 12. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, ed. Shu‘ayb Arnaout (Beirut, Lebanon: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1982), 10:599.
 13. In reference to the Yarmūk River, where the Islamic army defeated the Byzantine one in ḡumāda II 13 AH/ August 634 CE, and conquered the provinces of Syria and Palestine. See Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 132–34.
 14. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī, *Fatḥ al-mughūth bi-sharḥ alfiyyat al-ḥadīth li al-‘Irāqī*, ed. ‘A. ‘Uthmān (Medina, Saudi Arabia: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1968), 1:124–25.
 15. Muḥammad al-Zuhrī Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. ‘A.M. ‘Umar (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), 7:189.
 16. Muḥammad b. Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḥ al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, ed. M. A. Ibrāhīm (Cairo, Egypt: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1970), 1:401–2.
 17. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta‘rīkh*, 5:476–77.
 18. On George Vajda, “Dāniyāl,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2:115; André Lacocque, *Daniel et son temps* (Geneva, Switzerland: Labor et Fides, 1983), 12–16; Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Les fondations de l’Islam: entre écriture et histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 206–8; Lorenzo Di Tommaso, *The Book of Daniel and the Apocryphal Daniel Literature* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005), 29–80. On the Daniel genre of apocalypses, see David Cook, “An Early Muslim Daniel Apocalypse,” *Arabica* 49, no. 1 (2002): 55–57.
 19. Cook, *Studies on Muslim Apocalyptic*, 66.
 20. Khoury, *‘Abd Allāh b. Lahr’a*, 303; Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, 673.
 21. *Ibid.*, 674.

22. Khoury, *ʿAbd Allāh b. Lahīʿa*, 303, n. 397.
23. Isaiah 18:1–7.
24. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 33; Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, 672.
25. Quoted by Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 81, n. 203
26. *Ibid.*, 81–82.
27. On the treaty between Muslims and Nubians, see in particular Jay Spaulding, “Medieval Christian Nubia and the Islamic World: A Reconsideration of the Baqt Treaty,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 577–94.
28. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 188–89; al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 12–13; Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭat*, 1:542–47.
29. Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, 668.
30. Qurʾan 105.
31. Abraha was a general of the Ethiopian army that conquered South Arabia in 527 CE. In 530 CE, he usurped power by declaring himself king of Arabia. Recent epigraphic discoveries in Arabia show that he took royal titlature of Ḥimyar and extended his power to the whole Arabian Peninsula. See Christian Robin and Sālim Ṭayrān, “Soixante-dix ans avant l’Islam: L’Arabie toute entière dominée par un roi chrétien,” *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (Paris : De Broccard, 2012): 525–53.
32. On this attack, see Charles Pellat, “Fil,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 916; Cuoq, *L’Islam en Ethiopie*, 21; Lawrence Conrad, “Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary Topoi in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50, no. 2 (1987): 225–40. Christian Robin has given an exciting analysis of this event, based on recent epigraphic discoveries in Saudi Arabia: see Christian Robin, “L’Arabie dans le Coran. Réexamen de quelques termes à la lumière des inscriptions préislamiques,” in *Les origines du Coran, le Coran des origines*, ed. François Déroche, Christian Robin, and Michel Zinc (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2015), 36–48.
33. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Ḥimyarī Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, ed. ʿU. Tadmurī (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 1990), 1:183–84; Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫh*, 1:155. For an analysis, see Robin, “L’Arabie dans le Coran,” 39–44.
34. See in particular Iwona Gajda, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar à l’époque monothéiste* (Paris: De Boccard, 2010), part 1, chapter “L’occupation éthiopienne de l’Arabie

- du Sud (v. 527–575).”
35. Several narratives in the chapter of the *Kitāb al-Fitan* concerning Ethiopia are indeed dedicated to the destruction of the Ka’ba by the Ethiopians. See Nu’aym b. Ḥammād, *al-Fitan*, 671–72.
 36. Jérémie Schiettecatte, “L’Arabie du Sud et la mer du IIIe siècle av. au VIe siècle ap.,” in *Autour du Périples de la mer Érythrée*, ed. Marie-Françoise Boussac, J-Fr. Salles, and J.-B. Yon, special issue, *Topoi* (supp.) 11(2012): 254–58.
 37. Jérémie Schiettecatte, “À la veille de l’islam: effondrement ou transformation du monde antique,” in *Les préludes de l’islam. Ruptures et continuités des civilisations du Proche-Orient, de l’Afrique orientale, de l’Arabie et de l’Inde à la veille de l’Islam*, ed. Christian Robin and Jérémie Schiettecatte (Paris: De Boccard, 2013), 12–13.
 38. On the massacre of Najrān and its political background, see Christian Robin, “Nağrān vers l’époque du massacre : notes sur l’histoire politique, économique et institutionnelle et sur l’introduction du christianisme (avec un réexamen du *Martyre d’Aqīr*),” in *Le massacre de Najrān. Religion et politique en Arabie du Sud au VIe siècle*, ed. Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, and Christian Robin (Paris: Collège de France-CNRS, 2010), 39–106.
 39. Vasilios Christides, “The Himyarite-Abyssinian War and the Abyssinian Occupation of South Arabia in the Acts of Gregentius (ca. 530 A.D.),” *Annales d’Éthiopie* 9 (1972): 127. Gregentius was sent in 525 CE by the patriarch of Alexandria to assume the post of archbishop of South Arabia in the capital (Zafār) after its annexation by the Ethiopian Negus Kālēb in 523 CE.
 40. Pablo Ubierna, “Recherches sur l’apocalyptique syriaque et byzantine au VIIe siècle: la place de l’Empire romain dans une histoire du salut,” *Bulletin du centre d’études médiévales d’Auxerre*, Hors-série 2: 9–10, 23. doi:10.4000/cem.10895
 41. On the Apocalypse on Pseudo-Methodius, see in particular Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 13–51.
 42. Irfan Shahid, “The Kebra Negast in Light of Recent Research,” *Le Muséon* 89 (1976): 133–78; Lapchik Minski, “The Kebra Nagast and the Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: A Miaphysite Eschatological Tradition,” Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Faculty of Humanities, 2016, <https://www.academia.edu/28241463>. On the history of the *Kebra Nagast* and its sources, see Marie-Laure Derat, “Roi prêtre et Prêtre Jean: analyse de la Vie d’un souverain

- éthiopien du XIIe siècle, Yemreḥanna Krestos,” *Annales d’Ethiopie* 27 (2012): 127–43. Muriel Debié has shown that the aim of the *Kebrā Nagast* is to show the eternal supremacy of the Ethiopian royalty compared to others, such as Roman or Arab. Muriel Debié, “Le Kebrā Nagast éthiopien: une réponse apocryphe aux événements de Najrān,” in *Le massacre de Najrān. Religion et politique en Arabie du Sud au VIe siècle*, ed. Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, and Christian Robin (Paris: Collège de France-CNRS, 2010): 257–58.
43. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 103.
 44. Wahb b. Munabbih, *Al-Tījān fī mulūk Ḥimyar, riwāyat Ibn Hishām*. (Hyderabad, India: Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif al-’Uthmāniyya, 1928.
 45. A codex on papyrus attributed to Wahb, dated on 229 AH/844 CE, and containing a history of the prophet David, along with some fragments of the *Sīra* (biography of Muḥammad) is presented in Raïf-George Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972). On the interest of Wahb in Biblical history, see Alfred-Louis de Prémare, “Wahb b. Munabbih, une figure singulière du premier islam,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales* 60, no. 3 (2005): 531–49. On *Isrā’īliyyāt*, see Roberto Tottoli, “Origin and Use of the Term *Isrā’īliyyāt* in Muslim Literature,” *Arabica* 46, no. 2 (1999): 193–210.
 46. Kūsh is the most common term to designate Ethiopia in the literary traditions of the region (Syriac, Arabic, or Coptic). According to the Pseudo-Methodius, Kushyat was the mother of Alexander the Great. See Ubierna, “Recherches sur l’apocalypse byzantine et syriaque,” 10. On the other hand, Muslim sources connect Kūsh with a biblical ancestry, by means of Kan’ān, son of Ḥām b. Nūḥ, whereas they appoint Kūsh as the ancestor of Indians. See Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 8.
 47. Wahb B. Munabbih, *Tījān*, 52–53.
 48. It is worth noting that the majority of the first settlers in Fustāṭ, following the Islamic conquest, were Yemeni, especially from Ḥimyar, Ḥaḍramawt, and Ma’āfir; see Hugh Kennedy, “Egypt as a Province of the Islamic Caliphate, 641/868,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, vol. 1: Islamic Egypt, 647–1517*, ed. Carl Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 64. On the importance of Yemeni in the transmission of South Arabian tradition in early Islamic Egypt, see Jean-Claude Vadet, “L’‘acculturation’ des Sud-arabiques à Fustāṭ au lendemain de la conquête arabe,” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 22

- (1969): 7–14.
49. Al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad b. ‘Umar, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, ed. M. Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 3:983–84.
 50. Cuoq, *L’Islam en Éthiopie*, 36.
 51. This important event is called “al-hijra al-ūlā” (the first emigration) in Islamic tradition, which describes it as caused by the persecution of the first followers of Muḥammad by Mekkan leaders. See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, vl:349–66; Montgomery Watt, *Mahomet*, translated from English by F. Dourveil, S-M. Guillemin, and F. Vaudou (Paris: Payot, 1958–59), 142–50.
 52. Bashear, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars,” 173.
 53. For more on this concept, created by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1930s, see Pierre Nora, “La mémoire collective,” in *La nouvelle histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Paris: Retz-CEPL, 1978), 398–401.
 54. Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, 10:599. It is worth noting that the two manuscripts of the *Fitan* were transmitted in 288 AH/900 CE by the Egyptian scholar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥātim al-Murādī. See Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *al-Fitan*, 27. On the other hand, most of the traditions regarding Egypt, Ethiopia, and the West (*al-Maghrib*) in the *Fitan* are copied from the scroll of Ibn Lahī’a.
 55. Ibn Yūnus, *Tārīkh Ibn Yūnus*, 1:509.
 56. On this point, see the ideas of Cook, “An Early Muslim Daniel Apocalypse,” 57–66.
 57. The pre-Fatimid literature of Fuṣṭāṭ contains a significant corpus of poetry related to the glory of some royal lineages of Ḥimyar and Ḥaḍramawt. See for instance al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, 425–26.

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