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One of the most important recent events in the field of Ethiopian studies has been the almost contemporaneous publication of three important works: the edition of the Ethiopic text and one Arabic version of the *Martyrium Arethae*, by Alessandro Bausi and Alessandro Gori in 2006,¹ the edition of the Greek text of this same work by Marina Detoraki (with translation by Joëlle Beaucamp) in 2007,² and the Ph.D. Thesis by Antonella Brita (Napoli 2007),³ a discussion of many of the most important issues about the Nine Saints, together with a critical edition of the “Lives” of ʔäntälewön (8 MSS) and of Liqanos (3 MSS). The discussion (i.e. without the edition of the two texts) is now superseded by Brita’s brilliant volume published some months ago,⁴ which contains much new material (for example, a discussion on the 12 saints of Georgia, another on ancient translators in the Christian Orient, another on the contacts between Ethiopia and Syria in the Aksumite age, others on hagiographical method, and so on). As the present writer is preparing an Italian translation of the Aksumite royal inscriptions, he is able to make some marginal observations, taken from the introductory part of his book.⁵

I. The Nine Saints

For the Nine Saints in the *Synaxary* see Brita 2010: 41–43. As for Liqanos in particular (28 *ḥədar*) no notice is made in the *Synaxary* Colin, while the translation Budge 300 quotes only one miracle, that of the fingers which become lamps (Brita 2007a: 510; 2010: 141), very well known in Ethiopian hagiography.⁶

* This article was sent to the journal on Friday, 6 August 2010. Sources are quoted in abbreviated form (cp. below before the bibliography).

¹ BAUSI – GORI 2006.

² DETORAKI – BEAUCAMP 2007.

³ BRITA 2007a.

⁴ BRITA 2010.

⁵ Any precise bibliographical indication will be found in the aforementioned works. Given the historical character of this article, quotations are made from the translated texts.

⁶ BRITA 2007a: 510f., fn. 472, to which must be added at least *Mäṣḥafä Məṣṥir* 74 (which speaks exactly of the Nine Saints) and *Gädlä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus* in MARRASSINI 2003: 265f. [text]/83 [tr.], where for each finger the lights are three, for a total of 60.

Among the Ethiopian sources, a group which, in a sense, can be equated with those in Ethiopic are the writings of the Portuguese, which in some cases are of frankly second-hand nature (taken, e.g., from Baronio, or Simeon Metaphrastes, or de Urreta, or others), but in others openly declare themselves to derive from local sources.⁷ Many of them are quoted by Brita (2010: 48–52), but are not frequently utilized.

Brita 2010: 25–27 clearly indicates that the Nine Saints are in fact a group in formation. Generally speaking, only in the *Gädlä Pänṭälewon*, and in all the “laical” texts, like the *Short Chronicle* (Basset 411, Beguinot 2, Dombrowski 148), or in some Portuguese (Paez in Beccari II 517, Mendez *ibid.* VIII 70) the saints appear as an already formed group. In *Filpos* 705 and *Mäṣḥafä Məṣṭir* 73 both aspects seem to be present; in any case, their zones of operation are Eritrea and northern and central Təgray (especially the region of Aksum), that is, the zones of the oldest traditional (i.e. Sabaeans and Christian) civilization. Anyway, as far as I know, Brita is the first ethiopicist to develop the study of the traditions of the “XII Saints” of Georgia (2010: 8–17).

A second element is that the scope of the mission is rarely declared. A short formula is used only in some of the aforementioned “laical” texts (in the *Short Chronicle* Beguinot “they strengthened the Faith”,⁸ in the *Short Chronicle* Dombrowski “they made the Faith righteous”, *ʾastäratəʿu haymanotä*, which, as has been frequently observed, seems to allude to a Christian doctrine in particular – monophysitism – rather than to a conversion of pagans, as maintained in some non-Ethiopian or later sources).

Finally, it must be borne in mind that all these texts date from the 15th cent. onwards, that is to say, as Brita frequently notes (for example 2010: 40 and *passim*), at least one millennium later than the events they relate. So, their historical value is extremely reduced, and there is very little space left to the *histoire événementielle* to which Ethiopian studies were so implacably dedicated in the past (and partly also in present times). The frequent reference to today’s churches and monasteries increases the impression of tardiness of these texts instead of giving additional historical value. So, the only real help

⁷ E.g., about the Nine Saints: ...*em outro livro, que se guarda na mesma igreja de Agçum*, Paez in Beccari II 352; two books *de historia antiqua* in Paez in Beccari II 517 (and cp. Almeida in Beccari V 145, 147); the “Life” of Täklä Haymanot in Paez in Beccari II 518 and 521; *hum livro, que está no seu proprio mosteiro* in Barradas in Beccari IV 238 also for Yəṣḥaq/Gärima; *annales Auximitani* in Mendez in Beccari VIII 70 and 77. About Kaleb: *Historia do emperador Kaleb ou Elesbaam, assy como se acha nos livros de Ethiopia* in Almeida in Beccari I 321ff. = Beccari V 149ff.; a book which is found *em hum mosteiro muito antigo* in Paez in Beccari II 618; ... *historia referida nos livros de Acçum* in Almeida in Beccari V 161.

⁸ No text is given by Beguinot.

will come from historical and hagiographical *typology* – as Brita’s book, in my opinion, amply demonstrates.

The list of the saints seems to be fairly stable – although with some oscillations (see in general Brita 2010: 20–21, 25–29). In Gärima (and in other texts, like the *Miracles of Mary*) an ʿOš of Qʷəzara (“Caesarea”) appears, in the place of ʾAlef; sometimes a Mäṭaʿ appears, substituted (or as a second name) for Yəmʿata,⁹ or for ʾAlef or for Gärima; in *Filpos* a Mikaʾel appears in the last place, who, according to Conti Rossini, was in the place of ʿOš; there is also frequent pairing off of names otherwise separate, like “ʾAlef abba Şəḥma” in the fifth place in *Filpos*.¹⁰

With regard to the interesting and well informed chapters by Brita, it must be added that a changing of name is surely also due to the monastic rules, and moreover *Zä-Mikaʾel ʾArägawi* 40 explicitly states that Pacomius “imposed to each of them his name” (but without specifying it).¹¹ The traditional stories (very difficult to recognize in the *Synaxary*) about the second name of Yəşəḥaq (i.e. Gärima) of course demonstrate that this excellent Aksumite name was not understood any more, but the interesting fact remains of the existence of an old Aksumite name after 1200 years: could it be an indication of the “historicity” at least of the name itself?

For Yəmʿata of Qosyat (an Egyptian city well known from the *Miracles of Mary*, which just at that time were becoming very popular in Ethiopia) Brita 2010: 48f. correctly points out the curious fact that in the early tradition he is treated as a woman, founder of a monastery of Dominican nuns. This tradition, originating from the Ethiopian monk Thomas at the beginning of the 16th cent., reached (through Urreta 1611) Paez in Beccari II 514 (and it is of course not repeated in the other list on p. 517). Here (second quotation) and in other lists (Beccari V 145; Mendez *ibid.* VIII 70) his name begins with an element *Ad-* (*Ademaatâ*, *Adhamata* and *Adimata*); in Luis dos Anjos quoted by Barradas in Beccari IV 316 his name is *Lamapta*.

The position of ʿOš of Qʷəzara could not be more obscure than the preceding quotations might let one believe. In fact, according to Paez in Beccari

⁹ BAUSI 2003a: xxiii with fn. 17.

¹⁰ Cp. also BRITA 2010: 26. For other, less evident cases see BRITA 2007b: 1189a.

¹¹ To some of the saints are also given other names, which could be in fact only poetical appellatives: so for example: ʾAfşe is also called *Kokäbä şäḥay* (“astral sun” or the like) and *Bərhanä ʿaläm* (“light of the world”; but this also for Guba, and sometimes, in the same *Gädlä ʾAfşe*, also for Zä-Mikaʾel ʾArägawi; Liqanos [BRITA 2010: 28] says that this name had been given to him “after the worldly one”, but it is not said which this latter was). The sentence is *wasämä liqanosəni ḥaddis wəʾətu səmä təmḡātu zätäsämyä ʾəmdəḥrə səm ʿalämawi* – a sentence which appears quite inopportunistically, in a context which is not suitable.

II 517 and Almeida *ibid.* V 145 (from a *catalogo dos Emperadores*), °Oṣ was afterwards called Guba “inchado” (i.e. “conceited”)¹² because he had built a church on a high mountain, where he lived alone (so, in the sense of “haughty”, as Paez and better Almeida themselves here hint); there is a slightly different anecdote, from “the Aksumite annals” in Mendez in Beccari VIII 70; but in his *gädl* Guba is baptized with this very name by the patriarch Ṭimotewos.¹³ In the list of Luis dos Anjos quoted in Beccari IV 316 the two remain clearly differentiated.

One of the reasons why they decide to go to Ethiopia is the astonishing fact that she possesses a solid faith through only hearing of Christ, without the intervention of any apostle (cp., e.g., °*Afṣe* 107 and *Guba* 212). This traditional motif is found in many other texts: in *Mäṣḥafä Məṣṭir* 73f., in *Zä-Mikaʿel* °*Arägawi* 42, etc. In the same texts, in the *Gädlä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus*,¹⁴ and others, Ethiopia was afterwards given to the Virgin Mary. In *Mäṣḥafä Məṣṭir* 72f., in the passage about Frumentius, one can read: “Essi si meravigliavano dei costumi degli Etiopi e dicevano ‘Come mai hanno creduto?’, perché li vedevano costruire oratori, e sulla fronte delle donne vedevano il segno della croce. Si meravigliavano moltissimo e ringraziavano il Signore perché aveva concesso loro la fede senza predicazione e l’accoglienza della religione senza Apostoli”.¹⁵ In the “Life” of °*Abrəha and* °*Aṣḥəḥa* 162 Frumentius complains to the great priest ʾEnbäräm because of the fact that Ethiopia has received circumcision and faith, but not baptism and the eucharist.

The Nine Saints arrived in Ethiopia in the fifth year of king °Alʿamida,¹⁶ sixth king of Aksum after °*Abrəha* and °*Aṣḥəḥa*, son of Sälʿadoba and father of Tazena, in turn father of Kaleb,¹⁷ with all their furniture, and with 333 persons as their retinue (°*Afṣe* 108, *Guba* 202; in *Zä-Mikaʿel* °*Arägawi* 43 only “their priests and all their people”, quotation from the Ethiopic text of *Acts* 14: 13 according to the translator); in the *Mäṣḥafä Məṣṭir* 73f. (cp. Brita 2010: 44f.) the saints arrived “with their kings, with their princes and with their dignitaries, their priests, with their altars, with their sacred furniture, with

¹² Cp. Amharic *gubba* “hill, swelling”; Tigrinya *guba* “dome”, *gəb* “small hill”, *gobo* “mountain, hill”.

¹³ BRITA 2010: 200.

¹⁴ Cp. MARRASSINI 2003: 163, 310 [text]/54, 111 [tr.].

¹⁵ This is illustrated in the text by means of some quotations, among which *John* 20: 29 (about Thomas) “Blessed ... those who believe without seeing me”. Here and elsewhere, e.g., in *Filpos* and *Päntälewon*, the introduction of the Faith into the country is ascribed to the eunuch of the queen of Meroë, Candaces, about whom *Acts* 8: 26–39 speak.

¹⁶ Of this name like all the others which follow we do not take into account the graphic variants (e.g., °Alʿamida, °Alʿamida, °Alamida, °Alʿameda, °Alʿameda, °ʾElleʿameda, etc.).

¹⁷ The sole relevant exception is *Filpos* 705, for whom the arrival was under Tazena.

their books and with their people”, to general consternation, to the point that one might have thought they had the intention of conquering the country. So, the arrival of the saints is for the tradition not only an ideologically important event, but also one materially macroscopic. This recalls what Mendez says in Beccari VIII 70 (where he declares, as said before, he is translating “Aksumite annals”), that is, that the evangelizers arrived in a large number, but only nine settled in Təgray. Paez in Beccari II 517 reports a similar tradition, but says he could not find confirmation in the two historical manuscripts he had consulted in Aksum (and cp. *ibid.* 352).

“Syria” and “Syriac”. In our texts, the place of origin of the saints is always “Rome” (cp. also *Mäṣḥafä Məṣṥir* 73: *qəddusanä Rom*, Almeida: *de Rum* in Beccari V 145f., and Barradas *ibid.* IV 135, and cp. *ibid.* 238 and 246; also in Mendez *ibid.* VIII 70; “sent by Rome to teach this people” in a letter of Luis de Azevedo to the Provincial of Goa [1601] *ibid.* XI 87); sometimes the place of origin is given as “Greece” (*ṣərəʿ*, e.g., *Panṭalewon* 39 or *Zä-Mikaʿel ʿArägawi* 38; but this term can indicate also Egypt, and from an Ethiopian perspective all the three countries were more or less the same) or both (e.g., *Liqanos* 496). “From Rome and from Egypt”, in the *Short Chronicle* Beguinot 2 and Basset 411. Some can also come from “Asia”, but “Syria” (Sorya) is never mentioned, not even by the Portuguese, where Almeida in Beccari V 146f. only discusses the exact meaning of “Rom”, concluding that they must have come from a region where the cult of Anthony (their founder) existed; in Almeida’s opinion, not really from Rome (!), but from Egypt or from Palestine.

We shall not repeat here, for the *n*th time, the arguments against the traditional theory of the “Syriac” origin of these monks, and the philologico-cultural consequence that they translated the Bible, or at least parts of it, into Gəʿəz starting not from a Greek model, but from a Syriac one. It would also be rather tedious to repeat again the usual bibliography.¹⁸ We can only stress that: a) there is no question of “Syriac influences” in general,¹⁹ but only of “Syriac influences” *during the Aksumite age*; b) as said above, the Ethiopic texts, in indicating the provenance of the Nine Saints and the others, never use the term “Syria” but only “Rom” (whatever the meaning of this latter term

¹⁸ See now the excellent treatment by BRITA 2010: 29–31, and also her item “Nine Saints” in *EAE* 3: 1188–1191.

¹⁹ From this point of view, nothing useful can be gained from articles like that of WITAKOWSKI 1989–1990, who puts together elements of two different periods. In the Middle Ages Syriac influences, and also physical presence, are surely not in doubt; cp. for example the question of the “Syrian metropolitans”, on which cp. TADDESSE TAMRAT 1972: 60–72, 89.

might be);²⁰ and c) as very frequently in Semitic and Oriental studies, at this point the problem is basically one of terminology. As everybody knows, there is a big difference between “Syria” and “Syriac”: “Syria” is a vague indication including also Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon, from prehistory up to the political divisions of today; from the linguistic point of view, it includes through the millennia the Semitic languages of the family called “North-West Semitic” (Amorite, Ugaritic, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, and other minor languages); Greek and Latin; from the 7th cent., Arabic. Instead, “Syriac” is a much more restricted term, indicating the Eastern Aramaic dialect – and its speakers – used at the beginning in a limited part of “Syria”, that is the language of the city of Edessa (today Urfa, in Turkey), documented since the 1st cent. A.D. (and probably the most important language of the Christian Orient from the point of view of quality). Also the speakers of “Syriac” are frequently labeled as “Syrians”, and this engenders a certain terminological confusion with the first meaning, which indicates, it must be repeated, the inhabitants of Syria *in general*, quite independently from the epoch in which they lived (the situation in Italian should be theoretically different, because “Siriani” should be used for the general meaning, and “Siri” for the restricted one). This is probably the origin of one of the major misunderstandings of the entire affair, because for the *Vorlage* of the Ethiopian Bible Guidi (whose usage of a barbaric Italian was unsurpassed, except by Conti Rossini) 1888: 36, last footnote, employed the term “siro-occidentale”, which in Italian can mean (as already indicated by Polotsky 1964) “Syriac of the West” – instead of the correct “Syrian” (Italian properly “siriano”) *and* “Western”.²¹ So, the correct expression should have been “della Siria dell’ovest” or “*siriano/a* occidentale” in Italian. But that the real meaning of Guidi’s definition was exactly this latter, and that the version he had in mind was in fact a *Greek* one, and not a Syriac of any kind, is demonstrated by the fact that in the same article he goes on to specify “of S. Luciano”, that is the Greek text also called “Syrian” only because it was used by John Chrisostom in Antioch, or “Byzantine” or *koinè* because it was the most widespread in the Byzantine Church. As said above, the general term “Syria(n)” can also include Greeks and Greek, that indeed were for many centuries the most important (at least as far as written docu-

²⁰ It is true that some texts speak of “Antiochia” and “Caesarea”, but this mention, because of the immense fame and popularity of these two cities, can scarcely be utilized as positive historical proof (quite apart from the fact that they do not indicate automatically something written in Syriac: as it will be pointed out below, the text is called “Syrian” because it was probably used by John Chrisostom in Antioch and was a *Greek* one).

²¹ I.e. the version, which in turn was born in Africa or in the Near East, and called “western” because of its early appearance in western manuscripts, its being utilized by the Latin Fathers, and other “western” reasons.

mentation is concerned) people and language of this region. I think it would have been fairly surprising for a Roman citizen of the last centuries B.C., and of first centuries A.D., to hear that “Syrians” necessarily spoke “Syriac”. This is only to stress from the beginning that, if even any Ethiopic text had ever used the term “Syrian” or “Syria” in connection with the Nine Saints (which is not the case), in no way can this be automatically taken as an indication of the language and the people of Edessa. As a consequence, there is no need to reject the entire tradition about the Nine Saints in denying their “Syriac” affiliation: they could very well have been “Syrians” without speaking “Syriac”, but simply Greek (which was the normal situation for a “Syrian” of that time). After all, Frumentius and Aedesius, coming from Tyre, were “Syrians”.

From the philological point of view, it can be confidently said that no trace of any syriacism has been found so far in the Ethiopic New Testament, as clearly stated by Zuurmond 1989: I part, 114–23 in his edition of Mark’s Gospel; nor has any trace been discovered of the most typically “Syriac” New Testament production, the *Diatessaron* by Tatian (a text which survived in Syria until the first half of the 5th cent.), maybe because the *Diatessaron* disappeared too early: we know that Theodoretus of Cyrus (d. 458) and Rabbula of Edessa (bishop 411–430) materially deleted many copies of it from different churches – too early for being utilized by Ethiopia.²² In fact, only one possible (but apparent) syriacism has been found so far, that is a passage of Psalm 65: 17 quoted in the very fragmentary inscription *RIÉ* no. 195, by king Kaleb, celebrating his victory over Ḥimyar.²³ Nor can the clear syriacisms in the Ethiopic “Vulgar” version of the Bible (promoted by *Abunä Sälama*) be taken into account (and fortunately nobody has done so), because they are direct Arabicisms *only intermedially* coming from Syriac (the Arabic text being based on the Syriac). Also this problem of the *intermediate stages*, which sometimes makes every “ultimate origin” completely useless, is of paramount importance: a Syriac origin (if any) is of no importance, if a Copto/Egyptian equivalent is found; for Ethiopia, it is this latter, not the Syriac one, that is the real “origin”. This principle is clearly established by Brita 2010: 38–40. Another example in point could also be represented by the rock-hewn churches, which in the opinion

²² With exception, of course, of the so-called (by ZUURMOND 1989) “D-Text”, a late revision in which “diatessaronisms” seems to have penetrated through an Arabic intermediate stage (*ibid.* 82–88). Also others (e.g., HACKSPILL 1896) called the *Diatessaron* into question. Note that the *Diatessaron* is not directly known, but only through quotations and summaries.

²³ MÜLLER 1972: 63–70. On this passage see my article in the *Vattioni Memorial*, MARRASSINI 1999b.

of some scholars could derive from Syrian models,²⁴ but it could be a false problem, if the intermediate stage was Egyptian.²⁵

As for the many examples of translations quoted in the texts, it must be clearly said that in no case does the text specify *from which language* (Greek or Syriac) the translation was made: the text never indicates the original language.²⁶

Also Brita's presentation of some possible similarities between Ethiopian and Syriac monasticism (Brita 2010: 174–85) suffers from the fact, as she herself admits (p. 185), of these sources being much later²⁷ than the events to which they relate. As for the “towers” (*ibid.* 175–77), quite apart from the uncertain results of the archaeological investigations, it must be noted that this “tower” is indicated as such (Gəʿəz *məḥfād*) only in the tale about Soba and Noba in ʾAḥṣe 108 – that is, where it must have been a “true” tower, and in the Greek version of the *Martyrium Arethae* (*pyrgos*), speaking of the Greek monk Zonaiōs: but it becomes a simple “cell” (Gəʿəz *ṣomaʿat*, not “caverna” as in Bausi – Gori 2006: 257) in the Ethiopian tradition:²⁸ is this an indication of non-reception of this motif in the Copto-Ethiopian area? And it also goes without saying that, when the “tower” of Yəḥa was transformed into a Christian church, this happened not because it was (or it appeared as) a “tower”, but just because it was previously a pagan temple.

So, for the time being, the Syriac origin of the Nine Saints can still be considered to be nothing but a modern story, created accidentally in the West, after a series of mistakes and misunderstandings of some of the most authoritative scholars of that time, and accepted in Ethiopia for (unusual) psychological submissiveness.²⁹

If no source speaks, in reference to the Aksumite age, of “Syrians” or “Syriac” there are some (probably unreliable, but still more than the others, which amount to zero) which tell of the translation of the Bible from Hebrew or from Arabic. According to the *Mäṣḥafä Məṣṥir* 75 the Nine Saints *did not* translate the Bible, which had been already translated from Hebrew in the

²⁴ As for WITAKOWSKI 1989–1990: 68.

²⁵ DE CONTENSON 1961.

²⁶ Cp. also BAUSI 2003, on textual problems of the passage about the alleged translation of the Gospel by Libanos, and BRITA 2010: 32–39, with interesting examples relating to Gärima, both without the historical observation here made.

²⁷ She says: “800 years and more”, but the years are 1000 (from 5th to 15th cent.).

²⁸ “torrinha ou casa” or only “torrinha” in Almeida in Beccari V 148 and 156, “casinha” of Pāntälewön in Paez in Beccari II 620.

²⁹ In fact, it is surprising that, differently from what has been rightly done for the “South-Arabian origins” of Conti Rossini, one has never tried to attribute to the Ethiopians the full merit of the translation of the Bible. This problem is entirely different from that of Judaism, which is an integral part of the Christian traditions, as a constituent element.

Queen of Sheba's time; if it was translated after then, the Jews would have falsified it.

The letter by Luis de Azevedo in Beccari XI 87 (1601) speaks of a Bible translated from Arabic into "Chaldaic" ("which is the language of the books of this country, in great part similar to the vulgar language of this Tigré, and not less to Arabic"), clearly making allusion to the so-called "Vulgar" version by Sälama.

II. Kaleb and Nağrān

As for the Onomasticon, the name of the Abyssinian king is twofold, Kaleb and ʾEllä ʾAṣbəḥa. The usage, in fact, seems to be clearly subdivided into an internal (to Ethiopia) form (the first), and an "external" one (the second, for the rest of the world): South Arabian inscriptions (ʾl<ṣ>bḥ, cp. *Istanbul 7608bis* = *RES 3904*, s.d.), Byzantine sources, including the *Martyrium Arethae* (*Ellatzbāas*, *Ellesthēaios*, *Elesbāas*, *Elesbaās*, *Elesbaās*, *Elesbās*, *Elesbaá*, *Elesbaán*, *Elesboam*), and other sources (Armenian *Eghezbovam*, at least in part of the tradition, Georgian *Elisaba*); in the Portuguese, e.g., Paez (from Simeon Metaphrastes) in Beccari II 607 (*Elesbāo*) and 611ff. (*Elesbaam*), Almeida *ibid.* V 153ff., from Baronio (*Elesbaan*). The equivalence of the two names is perfectly clear in all the texts. Kaleb was the same as Elesbaan already for Almeida in Beccari I 325f. and Paez *ibid.* II 612. As a curiosity one can read the lucubrations of the same Almeida *ibid.* I 326f. and V 161f., on the primitive common origin of the two names. It is not known how this division (if any) was produced, but the fact remains that the only *direct* and *contemporary* Ethiopian witness (inscription *RIÉ* no. 191) uses both names.

The origin of the name is surely Semitic, from the root *šbh "to dawn" which exists, outside Ethiopic, also in Old South Arabian (more than 120 occurrences),³⁰ in Modern South Arabian and in Arabic. This root has produced in Ethiopia personal names like *ṣəbuh* (passive participle, in two monograms of Aksumite age, from Eritrea, *RIÉ* nos. 400 and 423), and the causative ʾaṣbəḥa,³¹ which is found also in the name of one of the two Abyssinian ambassadors who built a house in Zafār, in a South Arabian inscriptions dated to the reign of king Maṭṭadʾilān Yanūf (ca. 500–515), 619 ḥim., and also in Pre-Islamic North-Arabian.³² The use of this name in non-regal

³⁰ HARDING 1974: 365.

³¹ With at least 8 occurrences documented in Safaitic (HARDING 1974: 50).

³² The first part of the royal name, ʾEllä, contrary to LUSINI 2004: 70f., is to be connected, as already by Dillmann, with the relative plural pronoun ʾallä, which in this form or as ʾannä, still indicates in Amharic the retinue of a personage, and so his importance (it is probably the same element which appears in the plural forms of the personal pronoun: *ənnantä*, *ənnässu*, etc.).

texts makes highly improbable the proposal³³ that the name is derived from another root meaning “to collect tributes”.

This form of the name seems to be absent from post-Aksumite Gəʿəz texts, but it reappears today in Tigrinya,³⁴ probably without real continuity, but only by derivation from the historical event; that it is a genuine Gəʿəz formation is demonstrated by the final *-ha*, which in Tigrinya would be *-he*.

The title of the Ethiopian king is of the official type (of South Arabian origin) in *RIÉ* no. 191: “king (*ngs*) of Aksum, Ḥimyar, ḏu-Raydān, Sābā, Salḥēn, Ṭadam, Yamanat, Tihāmat, Ḥaḏramawt, and of all their Arabs, of Begā and Nobā, of Kāsu and Šəyāmo and of Drbt ...t of the region of ʾtfy, servant of Christ, who is not defeated by the enemy”. In literary texts frequently there occurs “king (*nəguś*, in the *Zway text*³⁵ in at least one instance substituted by *nağāsi*)³⁶ of Aksum/of the Aksumites” also in part of the *Zway text* (about 5 occurrences out of about ten: the others have “king of Ethiopia”); the Byzantine sources usually have “king of the Aksumites”, more rarely “king of the Indians” or “of Nubia”; “head [*həgoúmenos*] of the Ethiopians” in two sources (Nikephoros Kallistos 234, and George Kedrenos 695). The title is of course *al-nağāsi* in all the sources written in Arabic, “king of the Cushites”, or “of India Interior” in the Syriac sources.

The name of the persecutor is usually ḏū-Nuwās (*Dounaán* and others; *Dunaam* Paez in Beccari II 611f.), or *Fin(a)has* (also in Almeida in Beccari I 321 and *ibid.* V 150, Paez *ibid.* II 618), or Masrūq (only in the *Book of the Hinyarites*); the full name *Ysf ʿsʿr Yṯʿr* only in the inscription Ja 1028; Yūsuf in Ṭabarī V 194, Yosef in the newly discovered *Zway text*, where the epithet *zayənəʾəs* “the youngest” could very well be an allusion to the second of the two personages by the same name, doubled in the Islamic tradition, the first of whom was a glorious and noble king, while the second was the author of the persecutions, four generations later.³⁷

Note the frequent occurrence of a final *-n/-m*, also outside the Greek sources (and cp. *Elesbaan* etc.), in which it could be theoretically justified by an accusative (but its real syntactic position is not always that of an accusative).

He is called simply “king”³⁸ without any elaborate official title (but the inscriptions are written not by him, but by one of his generals), “king of Saba” in the Ethiopic literary sources (Saba being the name still in use at that time among

³³ FIACCADORI 2006: 64, repeated in ID. 2007: 329–332.

³⁴ See MORENO 1931: 50, MEAZA HAILE REVOL-TISSOT 1999: 36.

³⁵ Cp. the abbreviations.

³⁶ The title “king of Abyssinia” is sometimes supplemented by *nağāsi* (the usual Arabic title) in the Arabic version of the *Martyrium Arethae*.

³⁷ Cp. ROBIN 2004: 874.

³⁸ Also by the Portuguese.

the Ethiopians for Ḥimyar),³⁹ “king of the Omerites” in the Byzantine sources and some of the Syriac, and is usually called by name in the Arabic sources.

But the favourite appellation for the king in Christian sources is an interminable series of negative epithets, like “Jew”, “Hebrew”, “renegade” (on this see below), “infidel”, “bloodthirsty”, “arrogant”, “enemy of Christ”, “perverse”, and others.

Perhaps one of the most important issues in the discussion about Naḡrān has been the chronology – although the problem is limited to a span of seven years only. There is no doubt that the recent article by Beaucamp – Briquel-Chatonnet – Robin (1999–2000) has produced new materials, exposed in a systematic way, for a dating of these events not in 518f. or 523f., as before, but in 531. The most important element is the presence of an Abyssinian king, easily to be identified with ʾƏllä ʾAṣbəḥa, who, according to Procopius (*Ellestheaios*) and Malalas (*Elesboas*),⁴⁰ received a Byzantine embassy (led by the *magistrianus* of Egypt, Julianus) proposing an alliance against Kawadh I of Persia. This embassy must have taken place between April 19th, 531 (the date of the defeat of Belisarius at Callinicum) and September 15th of the same year (the date of the death of Kawadh).

As we have said, the problems are treated by these authors in a way which is nearly impeccable, trying to illustrate every crucial point with an abundance of details and clarity of exposition. Yet (even in realizing that seven years are not, after all, a historical tragedy), the present writer does not feel entirely convinced, for the following reasons:

a) if one eliminates the secondary chronological problems,⁴¹ all of them resolvable in one way or another,⁴² the only date present in the overwhelm-

³⁹ In Almeida Beccari V 163 it is clearly said that this province was first called *Sabea*, and after *Humerites*, with capital city *Pharea* (i.e. *Zafar*).

⁴⁰ In Theophanes the Confessor, because of an understandable mistake, it is *Arethas*.

⁴¹ For example the circularity in equating the dates of the South Arabian inscriptions with the beginning of the Ḥimyarite era; the vagueness of the indications of Cosmas and even of Procopius; the exact beginning of the Ḥimyarite era, which is put 115 or 110 years before the Christian era, just on the basis of the presumed beginning of this war (518 or 525 A.D.); whence the irretrievable circularity of the reasoning; the use of “Justinian” (or even “Constantine”) for Justin, or more shocking, such as found in Theophanes and in Kedrenos placing the events in the 15th or 16th year of Justinian; or, far more seriously, the question of bishop Paul, for whose presence the persecutor asks, but about whom the Nagranites answer that he had died two years before (see BEAUCAMP – BRIQUEL-CHATONNET – ROBIN 1999–2000: 49f.: the second Paul, however, ordered by the same Philoxenos of Mabbug, and never quoted in other sources, before or after, could also be a doublet, as already in MARRASSINI 1979: 184); in the *Second Letter* by Simeon (ed. Shahîd) twice the date of 835 of Alexander, but in the *explicit* year 830; or the presence of the Nestorian *katholikòs* Shilas at the Ramla con-

ing majority of the texts is the 5th year of Justin⁴³ = 835 of Alexander for the beginning of the persecution;⁴⁴

b) but what does really matter is the fact that, in the present writer's opinion, it is not legitimate to treat in the same way two different kinds of sources, one historical and the other purely hagiographical. Of course, the historical reality of the information given by Procopius cannot be put in doubt, and so surely *Ellēstheaiōs* was still in charge in 531; but what is lacking is the juncture between this fact and the tale of his resigning the throne; could anything more noble and "penitential" (and so, hagiographical)⁴⁵ be found, for a king, than to renounce his kingdom, become a solitary monk, and offer his crown as a gift to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem?⁴⁶ So, it is nearly impossible to connect these two events.⁴⁷ It is also possible that the silence of the Ethiopian sources about *Esim(i)phaios/Smyf* ሄደህ^c (i.e. on the activities of a Kaleb still a king in every respect), many years after his victory is due to this prevalence of the hagiographical tradition instead of an historical one,⁴⁸ or (but this could amount more or less to the same) to the focus of interest of these sources (the kind of "history" which they aimed

ference, or the date of the capture of the two Byzantine generals John and Timostratus, for whose rescue the Ramla conference had been organized.

⁴² See the various articulations in BEAUCAMP – BRIQUEL-CHATONNET – ROBIN 1999–2000: 42–48.

⁴³ With minor variants to the 4th, 6th and 7th year, explained by these same authors.

⁴⁴ Only in the Chronicle of Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre (i.e. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*), immediately before these facts the advent of Justinian is narrated in the year 846, but the indication is wrong, because it corresponds to the year 534/545, whereas Justinian ascended to the throne in 527 – but above all it seems to be generic, and it is repeated for several pages.

⁴⁵ According to one of the most widespread *loci classici* of hagiography, he goes out by night, or secretly (*Zä-Mika'el* ላላገላገላ 52; Almeida in Beccari V 159 [from Baronio]).

⁴⁶ All versions of the *Martyrium Arethae*; *Filpos* 705; Alvarez 494; Paez in Beccari II 612, 617f.; Almeida *ibid.* V 151, writing to the patriarch Jeab regarding hanging the crown by the door of the Holy Sepulchre (the citation of the patriarch is lacking in the *Short Chronicle*, *Filpos* and Paez/Almeida).

⁴⁷ From this point of view also the considerations by BRITA, who (2010: 78) speaks in this connection of the Melkite Patriarchate of Jerusalem (and cp. p. 152), seem a trifle too ingenuous and positivistic: is there in Christianity any place more sacred than Jerusalem? Note also that this hagiographical direction has led all native Ethiopian historiography of this period up a blind alley, where king Gäbrä Mäsqäl who, along with his endless building activities and those attributed to him (like those of Lalibäla and ላላገላገላ), really seems to be an invention (and anyway, the only son of Kaleb known so far is W^czb, the author of the inscription *RIÉ* no. 192).

⁴⁸ The reasons for the elimination from the *Martyrium Arethae* of this important interval are "evident" for M. Detoraki in DETORAKI – BEAUCAMP 2007: 53, but she does not specify them.

at), which was not political and diplomatic, but spiritual and hagiographic. So, also not entirely convincing is that king Kaleb really became a monk, but then temporarily retired from his ascetic life to fight the rebel Abraha⁴⁹ (maybe, who knows, after borrowing back the crown from Jerusalem). One can also conjecture that towards the end of the 16th century the tradition was still not yet completely stabilized, if Paez says he had received this information of the monastic retirement, and of the donation of the crown, from *hum frade velho, que sabe bem de historias*; and cp. also the fact that the manuscript utilized by Manoel de Almeida (in Beccari I 325 and *ibid.* V 151) stops just with the execution of the Ḥimyarite king, without speaking of the post-war period.

The problem of the chronology is obviously tied in with that of one or more expeditions. At least after Guidi 1880–1881 one is inclined to speak of two Abyssinian expeditions. This is demonstrated by a number of facts, which need not to be repeated here. Maybe it is better to speak, anyway, of a strong and continuous Abyssinian presence in Yemen well before Yūsuf's persecution.⁵⁰ Another element rarely utilized to demonstrate the existence of two expeditions, and so a marginal point indeed is the mention in some sources, of two wars: one by a pagan king who fights in favour of the Roman Christians against a judaizing king of Ḥimyar, and who after his victory becomes a Christian, as previously promised, obtaining a bishop and many priests for the evangelization and Romanization of his country; the other is precisely that of Nağrān; there are similarities in style and content, which help to bring the two stories nearer.⁵¹ But the most relevant element

⁴⁹ FIACCADORI in BERGER 2006: 65.

⁵⁰ The *Book of the Himyarites*, speaking of a first Abyssinian coming, can allude to both possibilities.

⁵¹ Such as that of the pagan king who takes the king of Ḥimyar alive, to be compared with the two different events, of the capture and of the killing, in the *Martyrium Arethae*, and in some "minor" sources (Malalas, Nikephoros Kallistos, Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre). In Theophanes the Confessor, George Kedrenos, Almeida in Beccari I 324, Paez *ibid.* II 619, Almeida *ibid.* V 150 there is only question of the capture of the king; in *Filpos* and Michael the Syrian 184 only of his death. Much more significant are the facts about the two bishops (although the Syriac Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre says that similar requests to Justinian were met every year); similar possibilities exist also for the information given by John Damascenus (in Theodorus Anagnostes), under emperor Anastasius (491–518), and Saint Gregentius. A specific and very particular situation relates to the facts connected with bishop John Paramonarios, recounted in John of Nikiu, Malala, Theophanes the Confessor, George Kedrenos, Nicephoros Callistos, Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre, and Michael the Syrian, who is rich in information also on his age and his chastity, also speaking of his previous occupation, maybe taking it for a personal name, as *Plwmmnr* and *Pyrmn*, and not mentioning a viceroy (excepted Malalas, who uses the very strange name

in indicating a certain parallelism between the two types of sources is the fact that in the “non-Naḡrān” group the Abyssinian king is a pagan who is to become a Christian in the event of victory. It is difficult to separate this promise from the hagiographic motif of king Kaleb who becomes a monk in all the versions of the *Martyrium Arethae* (including the *Zway text*), and in at least one of the “minor” texts (the most often cited, Nikephoros Kallistos, 14th cent.).

Brakmann⁵² has an interesting discussion about the two expeditions, but I think that we cannot be entirely satisfied with the brilliant definition of Mordtmann of a “historische Dittographie”.⁵³ It is possible that this “ditto-graphy” was produced by some elements of imagination, such as the remoteness of this Ethiopian country, incredulity at the existence of a Christian king down there, confusion between the various countries called “India” (note that many of the sources that speak of these two wars also tell of “the seven kingdoms of the Indians”); or the frequent confusion (on which Dillmann insisted) between “Justinus”, “Justinianus” (or even “Constantinus”), or between the many “Arethas” (in Theophanes the Confessor this name appears instead of that of the Ethiopian king himself, or of Abraha, the viceroy of Yemen appointed by him), or the many “Abraham-s” – but to label that series of events as a “Fabel” (Brakmann) does not say much from the historical point of view. In fact, the elements of superposition of the two series are really relevant. After the motif of the *baptized pagan king = retired Christian king*, which perhaps remains the most important, there are many others:

1. Identity of the two kings

In Malalas 642 and 671 the king of the Ethiopians (“Indians”) seems to be the same on both occasions (although he has two different names, *Andan* [in position of an accusative] and *Elesbōas*), because the text says, of the second, that he had defeated the king of the Ḥimyarites; the Ḥimyarite king

of *Anganes* “of his family”: clearly Abraha) seem to be very different from those of the unnamed bishop of the other (“naḡrānite”) group, narrated in the various versions of the *Martyrium Arethae*, in Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre and Michael the Syrian (with Abraha as a viceroy), with a reduced and hasty text, especially when compared to the tragic magnificence of the narrative which precedes, and so insignificant as not to contain, in the majority of the cases, even the name of the prelate – whose name, in the *Zway text* of the *Martyrium Arethae*, is John (Yohānnas); this last datum could be decisive, were it not that “John” was a very common name, and also that of the bishop of Jerusalem from 516 to 534. Anyway, it is clear that a superposition or a conflation cannot be excluded.

⁵² BRAKMANN 1994: 97–107.

⁵³ MORDTMANN 1881: 708.

is briefly mentioned only once.⁵⁴ Among the Syriac sources Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre 20 and 51 and Michael the Syrian 184f. tell of a victorious Ethiopian king who is the same as before, but over a different Ḥimyarite king, given that both Syriac texts clearly say that he died in the first war. In Malalas 268 and Theophanes the Confessor 323 this same Ethiopian king later received an embassy from the king of Byzantium (see above): his name in Theophanes the Confessor is *Adad*, but in Michael the Syrian *Elesbóas*.

2. Dates of the expeditions

As said above, the date seems to be the same for both events: 5th year of Justinus⁵⁵ = 835 A.D.

3. Historical narrative and hagiographical tale

Also the balance between historical narrative and hagiographical tale is different, and one could say almost complementary: the hagiographical tale has an overwhelming weight in the *Martyrium Arethae* including the *Zway text*, in the *I Letter* and *II Letter* of Simeon, Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre, Michael the Syrian and the *Book of the Ḥimyarites*; it has a prominent role, as a main cause of the war, in all the other Ethiopian sources (including those in Portuguese), and also in Nicephoros Callistos; it is very short in Theophanes, but sharply separated from the historical account of the war; it is limited to a hint, or nothing is said, in all the other texts.

4. Particular incidents

One meets incidents of no historical value, but precisely because of this philologically important, which each of the various sources tend to cross, such as that of the pagan king who takes the king of Ḥimyar alive occurring, in some “minor” sources (Malalas, Nicephoros Callistos, Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre) to be compared with the two different events, of the capture and of the killing found, in the *Martyrium Arethae*, in Theophanes the Confessor, in George Kedrenos, in Almeida in Beccari I 324, Paez *ibid.* II 619; in Almeida *ibid.* V 150 there is only question of the capture of the king; in *Filpos* and Michael the Syrian 184 only of his death.

5. Similarity/complementarity of motivations

Another element which has to be taken into consideration is the apparent difference of motivations. While those of the second war are exclusively

⁵⁴ So, Malalas speaks of one war only, and the second appearance of an Abyssinian king is in the episode of the embassy.

⁵⁵ With minor variants: 4th, 6th and 7th year.

religious, those of the first war seem above all economic, but with the involvement of some religious motivations: John of Nikiu, Malalas, Theophanes the Confessor and Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre point out just for this war a mainly commercial reason (the Ḥimyarite king had attacked and killed Roman merchants, accusing in turn the Romans of having ill-treated the Jews; in almost all the literary texts the Ḥimyarite king is called “Jew”). Note that in the narrative of Malalas 268 and Theophanes the Confessor 323 about the picturesque embassy to the Abyssinian king for an alliance against Persia, religious elements are not mentioned (although this occasion could be particularly suitable for such a complaint, and these religious elements could have been implicit in the extremely favourable reception of the Byzantine ambassador by the Abyssinian emperor). Instead, however, a hint is made of the commercial consequences of the impending war. Also political motivations could have existed: according to the *Martyrium Arethae* Saba paid tribute to the king of Ethiopia. All this could indicate a real historical situation, but also a certain formal intermingling among different sources, or vice versa the doubling of a single tradition.

6. The two bishops

Very significant, in my opinion, are the facts about the two bishops (although the Syriac Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre says that similar requests to Justinian were met every year); there are similar possibilities also for the information by John Damascenus (in Theodorus Anagnostes), under emperor Anastasius (491–518), and Saint Gregentius. But a specific and very particular situation is that of the facts connected with bishop John *Paramonarios* – recounted in John of Nikiu 142, Malalas 251, Theophanes the Confessor 323, George Cedrenos 751, Nicephoros Callistos 302–04, Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre 42f., and Michael the Syrian 183 – all containing the same pattern⁵⁶ – all also rich in information on the age and the chastity of the future bishop, and speaking of his previous occupation, maybe taking *Paramonarios* as a personal name in Syriac (*Plwmmnr* and *Pyrmmn*²), and without a viceroy (except Malalas, with the very strange name of *Anganen* [in position of an accusative] “of his family”: clearly Abraha). These details seem to be very different from those of the unnamed bishop of the other (“Naḡrānite”) group, recounted in *Martyrium Arethae* (Greek 280–82, Arabic 87, Gəʿəz 297), Pseudo-Denys of Tellmahre 51 and Michael the Syrian 185 (with Abraha as a viceroy), with a reduced and

⁵⁶ The victorious newly converted king sends to Alexandria (two senators with 200 persons in some of these texts), to ask Justinian (*sic*) to grant him a bishop and some priests to Christianize his country, and to make it pass “under the Romans”. The emperor allows them to choose whom they want.

hasty text, especially when compared with the tragic magnificence of the narrative which precedes, and so insignificant as not to contain, in the majority of the cases, even the name of the prelate – whose name, in the *Zway text*, is John (Yohannās); this last datum could be decisive, were it not that “John” was of course a very common name, and also the name of the bishop of Jerusalem from 516 to 534. Anyway, it is clear, I believe, that a superposition or a conflation cannot surely be excluded.

One can conclude that the two narratives are at the same time so close and so complementary that it is not easy to suppose that they refer to two completely different events; on the other side, if a conflation has been produced, some events that this has produced must have existed, and the simple questions of onomastic and prosopographical confusion do not seem to possess, in my opinion, enough weight to explain it completely. That the Abyssinian expeditions were at least two is perhaps the most widespread opinion, as we have said, at least after Guidi 1881. But Guidi based himself on the internal evidence of the sole *I Letter* (and some minor texts, among which “forse in parte Procopio”), and decisively excluded the other Byzantine and Syriac historians.⁵⁷ That the Ethiopian expeditions were two (thus including Guidi’s opinion) is corroborated by the union of the hagiographical sources (*Martyrium Arethae*, *Book of the Himyarites*) with the inscription *RIÉ* no. 191. This inscription is very interesting, because it brings us to the exact moment immediately after the first expedition by Kaleb, who is said to have sent with his troops his general Ḥyn, probably the same as Ḥywn², quoted as a commander of the first Abyssinian expedition in the index of the *Book of the Himyarites*; besides, Kaleb is said to have built a church in ^ḥ*qn*^l, in Himyar, almost certainly the same place as ...*n*²*al* found in the inscription *RIÉ* no. 195 (by the same Kaleb), where, at the end of the war, the Abyssinian king was to execute the king of Himyar. It is sure that we are here in the interval between the two wars, because there is no allusion to the great final victory. It is also possible to venture an hypothetical dating, such as rarely happens with Ethiopian inscriptions: perhaps 521 A.D.

But what is proposed here is that, differently from Dillmann–Mordtmann–Guidi, the two narratives really correspond to the two wars: the one (the ‘minor’ authors) to the first Abyssinian expedition, the other to the true “Nağrān war”. To the situation preceding the first war could refer to both the king’s

⁵⁷ “Da queste notizie credo debbansi affatto distinguere quelle di Giov. Efes., Malala, Teofane, ecc. (Nöld. 186) relative ad un’invasione anteriore, anche perché il re abissino che in Procopio è *christianós te on kai dóxēs tēsde hōs málista epimeloúmenos* nei detti autori è ancora un pagano” (GUIDI 1880–1881: 479, fn. 4). Not clear the opinion of NÖLDEKE 1879: 186, quoted by GUIDI.

attitude described by Cosmas in his *Topographia Christiana* (for the second Abyssinian expedition, a true crusade after the persecutions, there was no need of any justification whatsoever by looking for precedents) and the “Consolation Letter” by Jacob of Sarug (very generic).⁵⁸

For this first war, also won by Kaleb, the date is indicated indirectly, but fairly precisely: one term is the presence of Maʿdikaṛib Yaʿfur as a Christian king put on the throne by the Abyssinians, and dead a little before the persecution of Yūsuf; his inscription *Ry 510* is dated 631 ḥim.; the other term is the date itself of the persecutions, which was June and July 633 ḥim. (= 522 or 517 A.D.), so the first Abyssinian expedition must have taken place before winter 632 ḥim. (because the *I Letter* by Simeon and the *Martyrium Arethae* say that the Abyssinians, after the revolt and first persecution by Yūsuf, were not able to intervene just because of the winter); it is not possible to achieve more precision, because we do not know the exact date of the death of Maʿdikaṛib. The version of the christianized pagan king could be interpreted, then, as a *facilior*.

In talking about hagiography, there is no need to insist here on the personage of Pāntālewōn (in some important texts not quoted by name), who occupies a kind of “ideological pigeon-hole” in the narrative of the war (consultation by the king, miracles before landing and at the end of the battle).⁵⁹ This pre-eminence of Pāntālewōn does not presume any dependence, if substance and not just location is taken into account, with the figure of the monk Zōnaîos, to whom he has been assimilated by tradition itself, because in the *Martyrium Arethae* this monk only appears on the occasion of the consultation by the king. That the general layout is exactly the same, and that the difference consists only in the insertion of a personage (Pāntālewōn) in the place of another (Zōnaîos) is demonstrated by another partial similarity, that of the episode of the gold contained in the lumps of incense.

There is no confusion at all, instead, between the secular and hagiographical levels, in the personage of Zōnaîos, who does not appear in anything resembling the miracles attributed by Ethiopian tradition to Pāntālewōn (that is, to the same *functional* personage). That the ideal role and figure are the same allows one to equate the hagiographical motif, not the historical persons, as has been done recently, unembarrassedly passing from the one

⁵⁸ MARRASSINI 1979: 184 and 185; partly already GUIDI 1880–1881: 179.

⁵⁹ Confirmed by all the witnesses; cp. also Almeida in Beccari I 323–24, Paez *ibid.* II 619 and Almeida *ibid.* V 150; *ibid.* II 620, at the end of the event, it is said that God did *toda esta merces polla oração do frade daquella casinha*.

to the other;⁶⁰ instead, more attention should be paid to the hypothesis of Moberg,⁶¹ that the name of this Zōnaïos could be the same as that of the commander of the landing forces, who in the index of the *Book of the Himyarites* (chp. xlii) is Z^ʿwns.

Another problem is that in our Ethiopic texts (among the Portuguese, Almeida in Beccari I 323, Paez *ibid.* II 618 and Almeida *ibid.* V 156 [from Baronio]) the king of Ḥimyar had the chain installed just after the failure of the land attack by the Ethiopians (the 15,000, or 1,500, “black people” dying of thirst). This is a serious difference when compared with the inscriptions, where the chain is installed much earlier, i.e. before the Nağrān persecutions. In the literary texts the installation is always after the persecutions; the consultation of the monk by Kaleb is *before* the failed Ethiopian attack in the *Martyrium Arethae* in all its versions (Greek, Arabic, Ethiopic; *Zway text*), and in Almeida in Beccari V 156 [from Baronio] – that is in the “non-Ethiopian” (by origin) sources; it is put *after* in other sources, as in *Pāntālewōn*, in Almeida in Beccari I 321 and in Paez *ibid.* II 618 (da un *livro ... em hum mosteiro muito antigo*), where the consultation comes only after the king hears of the defeat, and, indeed, is simply consoled by the monk.

What also raises some problems is the accession of the Ḥimyarite king,⁶² because it is usually only said that he became king after the death of the Christian Ḥimyarite king put on the throne by the Abyssinians (*M^cd^kerm* in the *Book of the Himyarites*, *M^cd^wkrwm* in the *II Letter* by Simeon [ed. Shahîd] = Ma^cdikarib Ya^cfur in *Ry 510*, of the year 631 ḥim. era – so only two years before the Nağrān persecutions). But the Greek and Arabic versions of the *Martyrium Arethae*, quoting the words of emperor Justinus writing to Kaleb, say that (also) the wicked Jewish king was put on the throne by the Abyssinians, and this made it easier for him to seize power. To be more precise for this period of transition seems nevertheless impossi-

⁶⁰ FIACCADORI 2006: 64f. continually interchanges the two persons, and ascribes to the one what is proper of the other, and vice versa; e.g., on p. 65 “he [i.e. Zōnai(n)os/Zōnaïos] is numbered among the Nine Saints”, whereas no Ethiopian source includes him among them, or p. 66: “the Martyrion has it that Kaleb’s cell was attached to the monastery of Zonainos”, whereas the *Martyrium Arethae* § 39 only says that Kaleb “ascended a high mountain, where there was a monastery of athletes, got into a cell and shut himself there”, without quoting Zonainos or any other person.

⁶¹ MOBERG 1924: lxxxix, where he in fact speaks against the fanciful interpretation of CARLO CONTI ROSSINI, in: *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 9 (1922), pp. 426–30, esp. p. 429, that this name contained the same letters as ḏū-Nuwās, but in a reverse order (MÜLLER 1978: 164 does not treat this problem).

⁶² For that of Kaleb there are no problems. Only the “Life” of Gärīma speaks of disorder before the accession of Kaleb, in connection with the killing of the dragon.

ble, and one can perhaps recall, very generally, the disorders that must have happened immediately before the war; an obscure hint of them may perhaps be found in the *II Letter* of Simeon (p. 56), where the capture of Yūsuf by the Abyssinians is related, together with his escape from death only thanks to a Christian merchant from Hira, who declared he was a Christian; or maybe his wounding (?) in the inscription *Ry 507*; moreover, the possibility that Yūsuf was once a Christian had already been suggested by Shahîd (1971: 260–68), and stressed by Köbert (1973: 464), but without quoting this passage of the *Martyrium Arethae*. In a sense, also the obscure relationship of the Ḥimyarite king with Saint Arethas and his father could be taken into consideration. From this point of view, also appellatives like “renegade” (*kāhadi*, which does not seem, anyway, to be more frequent than others), or “Judah” could acquire a different value.

At this point one may ask oneself if the emendation from *monakhós tis* into *monomákhos tis* proposed for the Greek text of the *Martyrium Arethae* is really justified. Obviously, the Ethiopian tradition has, so to speak, stabilized (as homage to Pāntālewón himself?) in this passage the presence of a monk, and this is reflected by the Portuguese, who to a certain extent utilize local sources – and so not representing independent witnesses. But as usual in philology, much more than the mechanical criteria, what is of importance are the internal considerations. Now, the episode in the *Gädlä Pāntālewón* is not connected with a text similar to that of the Arabic and Ethiopic *Martyrium Arethae*,⁶³ but to one of the type of the Greek *Martyrium Arethae* and the inedited Arabic version; and this precisely because of the presence in these latter of the mysterious voice shouting “Gäbrəʾel. Gäbrəʾel”. Instead, in the edited Arabic and Ethiopic text of the *Martyrium Arethae* the narrative as it stands does not leave any room for the intervention of a legendary element (the cry, or a personage like Pāntālewón⁶⁴ or others). So there are very different traditions, which one is not obliged to reconcile at all costs. Provided that the Greek/unpublished Arabic *Martyrium Arethae* reveals, together with *Pāntālewón*, a clear tendency towards the fantastic and supernatural, the presence of a “monk” who accomplishes the decisive action, instead of a “soldier”, is more than obvious (and after all, what kind of an extraordinary event would it have represented, in that terrible carnage, for a soldier to injure and kill a horse?). Lastly, on the level of

⁶³ See also BRITA 2007a: 344, fn. 93, who clearly distinguishes the two narratives and provides an excellent synopsis of the relevant passages of the *Gädlä Pāntālewón* and of the *Martyrium Arethae*, *ibid.* 161–84 and ID. 2010: 151–73. There is nothing specific on this point in NOSNITSIN 2004: 104 with fnn. 59–61.

⁶⁴ Who in the Ethiopic (not in the Arabic) version was explicitly quoted, and consulted by Kaleb.

the general structure of the narrative, the passage in the Greek/unpublished Arabic *Martyrium Arethae/Pāntālewōn* appears so confused and obscure that substitution with a smooth narrative such as reflected in the Arabic and Ethiopic *Martyrium Arethae*, is not impossible to consider, in its very elementarity as a western-movie, as a *facilior* tradition.

Abbreviations and Sources

^o*Abrāha and ^oAṣbāha* = P. MARRASSINI, “Il Gadla Abreha waAṣbēha: *Indicazioni preliminari*”, in: *Miscellanea Aethiopica ... Stanislao Kur ... Oblata*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Archidiecezji Warszawskiej, 2000 = *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 12/2, (1999 [but 2000]), pp. 159–179.

^o*Afṣe* = R. SCHNEIDER, “Les Actes d’Abba Afsé de Yeha”, *Annales d’Éthiopie* 13, 1985, pp. 105–118.

Almeida = s. Beccari V.

Alvarez = F. ALVAREZ, *Ho Preste Joam das Indias. Verdadeira informaçam das terras do Preste Joam ...*, s.l. [Lisboa] 1540 [repr. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1889]; C.F. BECKINGHAM – G.W.B. HUNTINGFORD (eds.), *Francisco Alvares. The Prester John of the Indies. A True Relation of the Lands of the Prester John, being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520 written by Father Francisco Alvares. The translation of Lord Stanley of Alderley (1881) revised and edited with additional material*, 2 vols. = Hakluyt Society s. 2, 114–115, Cambridge, 1961 [English transl.].

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ca. *La grande impresa di Amda Sion. Romanzo storico del XIV secolo. I miracoli di Abbà Garimà. Omelia del XV secolo. Tradotti dalla lingua originale da B.D.*, Milano: Aldo Garzanti editore, 1939, pp. 99–154 [Italian transl.].

Gregentius = s. BERGER 2006.

ḥim. = Ḥimyarite era.

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Summary

The article tries to point out some miscellaneous problems related to the traditions of the Nine Saints and to the Ethio-Ḥimyaritic war of the 6th cent. A.D. For the first subject the interesting results achieved by Antonella Brita (2010) are basically confirmed, and a paragraph against the alleged Syrian/Syriac provenance of these saints is added. As for the second subject, after some onomastic notes stressing the traditional etymology of the second name of king Kaleb (from **sbh* 'to dawn') and recalling the existence in the Islamic tradition of two kings Yūsuf (this explaining in turn the indication "Yūsuf the younger" found in at least one of the versions of the "Martyrium Arethae"), the texts which tell of a pagan king of Ethiopia who defeats a Judaizing one from Yemen (who in turn has persecuted Christians) are identified as speaking of the first of the two Ethio-Ḥimyaritic wars. Finally, the interesting proposal by Beaucamp – Briquel-Chatonnet – Robin (1999–2000), according to which the war should be dated at least in 531 because Procopius speaks of a still active (and not yet retired to monasticism) king Kaleb at that epoch, is put in doubt, because it tries to conciliate two entirely different kinds of sources, one historical and the other purely hagiographical, which as such has not to be compulsorily harmonized with the first.