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Sobhi Bouderbala

► To cite this version:

Sobhi Bouderbala. Al-Ḥabasha in Miṣr and the End of the World. Egyptians Apocalypses from Early Islam related to the Ethiopians. Northeast African Studies, 2019, Ethiopia and Nubia in Islamic Egypt: Connected Histories of Northeastern Africa, 19 (1), pp.9-22. 10.14321/nortafirstud.19.1.0009 . hal-02934450

HAL Id: hal-02934450

<https://hal.science/hal-02934450>

Submitted on 9 Sep 2020

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Al-Ḥabasha in Miṣr and the End of the World. Egyptians Apocalypses from Early Islam related to the Abyssinians¹

Islamic narratives sources report little information on the relationship between Egypt and Abyssinia – called al-Ḥabasha in Arabic sources – in early Islam². According to the oldest Egyptian one, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa akhbāruhā*, written by Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871), the Umayyad governor of Egypt, Maslama b. Mukhallad al-Anṣārī (47/668-62/682) sent an embassy to the master of Abyssinia (*ṣāhib al-Ḥabasha*)³, while al-Kindī (d. 350/961), in his *History of Governors of Egypt*, relates an Egyptian expedition in Abyssinia in 150/767 against a Muslim Kharijite group⁴. The topographical literature of Egypt, called *al-Ḥiṭaṭ*⁵, adds more information: al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), according to al-Quḍā‘ī (d. 454/1063), mentions Abyssinian elements in the army of ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ who conquered Egypt in 20/641⁶. The presence of Abyssinians in the beginning of Islamic rule in Egypt seems confirmed by the toponymy of the new city of al-Fustāt: 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 Egypt⁷.

¹ This paper is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 726206).

² Ullendorff, “Ḥabash, Ḥabasha”, 3. See also Cuoq, *L’Islam en Ethiopie, des origines au XVIe siècle*, 6. The term Ḥabash, used by Muslim historians and geographers, designates especially the population of Abyssinia. They often add the term 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 African Horn, including Nubia. On these questions, see especially Robin Seignobos, “L’autre Éthiopie: la Nubie et la croisade (XIe-XIVe siècle)”: 49-50.

³ *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 286.

⁴ Al-Kindī, *al-Wulāt wa al-quḍāt*, 116.

⁵ On this literature, see Bouderbala, “L’histoire topographique”, p. 167-188.

⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, vol. 1, 561. This information concerns the settlement of military groups in al-Jīza, 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.

⁷ On Birkat al-Ḥabash, see *Ḥiṭaṭ*, vol. 3, 510-515. 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 Fustāt. 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: *Tārīkh Ibn Yūnus*, vol. 1, 399. This explanation seems to be an attempt to arabize the toponym, more than the historical reality. Ibn Duqmāq and al-Maqrīzī, according to al-Quḍā‘ī, say that the pond was known firstly 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 (90/709-95/715). It is after many years (al-Quḍā‘ī did not say exactly when) that it acquires definitively the name of the Pond of Ethiopians. See Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Intiṣār li wāsiṭat ‘iqd al-amṣār*, vol. 4, 55; *Ḥiṭaṭ*, vol. 3, 511.

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 sources, which could most likely be the oldest narratives written in Islam: the Apocalyptic⁸, known in Arabic as *al-malāḥim wa al-ḥitan*. The context of writing of this literature is deeply connected with the wars between Islam and Byzantium in the 1st/7th century⁹, and these Islamic traditions are, as many scholars already showed, deeply influenced by other Apocalyptic traditions, especially Jewish, and Christian ones¹⁰. The oldest books on Apocalypse were written in Egypt in the beginning of the 3rd/9th century in Fustāt. The first one is a scroll of papyrus, named *Ṣaḥīfat ‘Abd Allāh b. Lahī’a*, by its editor¹¹. In fact, the author was not ‘Abd Allāh, a famous cadi and scholar from Fustāt (2nd/8th century), but rather a pupil of ‘Uthmān b. Ṣāliḥ (d. 219/834), disciple of Ibn Lahī’a. The second book, more famous, is the *Kitāb al-ḥitan*, written by Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād (d. 228/843)¹². Even if Ḥammād was from Marw, Khurāsān, he spent the last forty years of his life in Fustāt where he wrote his book¹³, and one can easily find the Egyptian influence on his work.

In these texts, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (d. 65/685) appears as the main Egyptian authority regarding Apocalyptic narratives. Some historians mention that, on the day of the Yarmūk battle¹⁴, ‘Abd Allāh found a scroll containing a number of Apocalyptic narratives written by Jewish and Christian people (*ahl al-kitāb*)¹⁵. Others assert that he knew Syriac¹⁶, which allowed him to read the Bible¹⁷, but especially Apocalyptic books, in particular the Book of Daniel¹⁸. The latter is known as the writer of an important book containing Apocalyptic revelations¹⁹, which exerted influence on some traditions written by ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr and related to Abyssinia. In Islamic Apocalyptic texts written in Fustāt, two references to Abyssinia and

⁸ On Muslim Apocalyptic, see the study of Cook, *Studies on Muslim Apocalyptic*, especially chapter one, *Historical Apocalyptic*, 34-91.

⁹ Bashear, “Apocalyptic and other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars”, 173-174.

¹⁰ Cook, *Studies on Muslims Apocalyptic*, 2-10.

¹¹ Khoury, *‘Abd Allāh b. Lahī’a (97-174/715-790)*, 243. The editor considers the subject of the scroll as diverse, consisting of a collection of ḥadīth including the theme of the Apocalypse (p. 211). Nevertheless, an accurate reading of the papyrus, compared with the narrative material found in other Apocalypse books, shows that it has a single subject: *al-ḥitan* in its largest definition (civil war, apocalypse).

¹² Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-ḥitan*, 25-29; and the introduction of David Cook in his translation of Ḥammād’s book: *The Book of Tribulations*.

¹³ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a’lām al-nubalā’*, vol. 10, 599.

¹⁴ In reference to the Yarmūk river, where the Islamic army defeated the Byzantine one in ġumāda II 13/ August 634, and conquered the provinces of Syria and Palestine. See Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 132-134.

¹⁵ Al-Sakhāwī, *Faṭḥ al-mughīth bi-sharḥ al-ḥadīth li al-‘Irāqī*, vol. 1, 124-125.

¹⁶ Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 7, 189.

¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 1, 401-402.

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 5, 476-477.

¹⁹ On Daniel, see Vajda, “Dāniyāl”, 115 ; Lacocque, *Daniel et son temps*, 12-16 ; De Prémare, *Les fondations de l’Islam*, 206-208; Di Tommaso, *The Book of Daniel and the Apocryphal Daniel Literature*, 29-80. On the Daniel genre of apocalypses, see Cook, “An Early Muslim Daniel Apocalypse”, 55-57.

Abyssinians as Apocalyptic actors in Egypt are to be found, all transmitted by ‘Abd Allāh. The first narrative describes the Abyssinian expedition against Egypt in a stage of what David Cook calls Christians counter-invasions²⁰:

عبد الله بن عمرو بن العاص: تقتتلون بوسيم فيأتكم مددكم من الشام فإذا نزل أولهم هزم الله عدوكم ولا تزالون
تقاتلونهم إلى لوبية ثم ترجعون ثم تأتكم الحبشة في ثلاثة آلاف سفينة عليهم أسيس فتقاتلونهم أنتم وأهل الشام²¹

‘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 3000 boats commanded by Asīs. Then, you and the Syrians will fight them.

The battle of Wasīm is described as opposing Muslims to the Andalusians (ie., the Spanish); another report states that the Abyssinian expedition will happen a year after the Andalusian²². The Abyssinian expedition is described as a huge army (3 000 boats), commanded by Asīs, who is identified by Raïf-George Khoury as the Biblical prophet Isaiah²³, known for his messianic predictions. The biblical character of this Islamic narrative is very clear, especially since in the Bible, Isaiah evokes in his prediction Abyssinian messengers sent on board ship and going back up the river (probably the Nile)²⁴.

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 مستعجلاً فناده: 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 الفسطاط 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 فيقتلون فتهزم الحبش فيقتلهم المسلمون و يأسرونهم حتى أن الحبشي ليباع بالكساء²⁵.

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:

²⁰ Cook, *Studies on Muslim Apocalyptic*, p. 66.

²¹ Khoury, *‘Abd Allāh b. Lahī’a*, p. 303; *Fitan*, p. 673.

²² Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, 674.

²³ Khoury, *‘Abd Allāh b. Lahī’a*, 303, note 397.

²⁴ Isaiah 18, 1-7.

²⁵ Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 33; Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, 672.

Maslama sent me to Manf (Memphis) to dig in search of Pharaoh's treasure. [ʿAbd 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 Apocalyptic. 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"²⁶. 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 ground²⁷. David Cook's analysis is attractive. He 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. Secondly, – which is more important – Nubians at that time (the second half of the 1st/7th century) had already sealed a pact with Muslims, known as the *Baqt*²⁸. Egyptian Muslim sources indicate that the pact was concluded after the battle of Dongola in 31/652²⁹. One can suppose that the replacement of the Nubians by the Abyssinians in the above-mentioned tradition is a consequence of this pact, since Nubians were not anymore enemies of Muslims. This is confirmed by another apocalyptic narrative related to the ruin of Egypt in the end of the world, showing the principal dangers that threaten Egypt:

²⁶ Quoted by Cook, *Studies on Muslim Apocalyptic*, 81, note 203.

²⁷ Cook, *Studies on Muslim Apocalyptic*, 81-82.

²⁸ On the treaty between Muslims and Nubians, see especially Spaulding, "Medieval Christian Nubia and the Islamic World", 577-594.

²⁹ Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 188-189; al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 12-13; *Khīṭaṭ*, vol. 1, 542-547.

تهلك مصر إذا رُميت بالقسي 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*³⁰.

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 can be given to understand the representation of Abyssinia in early Muslim sources: the episode of the Abyssinian attack on Mecca in the middle of the 6th century, called in Muslim tradition “*‘ām al-fīl*”, the “year of the elephant”, and well described in the Koran in the Elephant sura³¹. This event took place in the 6th century when Abraha, king of Arabia³², attacked the Arabian city of Mecca and tried to destroy the temple of al-Ka‘ba³³. According to the Muslim tradition, this event is to be placed in 570. Its date is not certain however, since Abraha took the power in South Arabia in 530. But it could be a symbolic date since the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad is placed on the same year by the Muslim tradition³⁴. It is likely that the event is to be put in connection with the Abyssinian invasion of the Yemen in 527 and the destruction of Ṣafār, the Ḥimyarite capital³⁵. 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 people³⁶.

Another interpretation of the invader image attributed to the Abyssinians is possible. Going back in time, in the 3rd century A.D, one can note the deep 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 between Axum, Ḥimyar and Saba’, from 220 to 270, which leads

³⁰ Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, 668.

³¹ Quran 105.

³² The famous Abraha is a general of the Ethiopian army that conquered South Arabia in 527. In 530, he usurped power by declaring himself king of Arabia. Recent epigraphic discoveries in Arabia show that he used the royal titulature of Ḥimyar and extended his power to the whole Arabian Peninsula. See Robin, Ṭayrān, “Soixante-dix ans avant l’Islam : l’Arabie toute entière dominée par un roi chrétien”, 525-553.

³³ On this attack, see J. Ruska, Ch. Pellat, “Fīl”, 916; Cuoq, *L’Islam en Ethiopie*, 21; L. Conrad, “Abraha and Muḥammad”, 225-240; More recently, Christian Robin has given a very exciting analysis of this event, based on recent epigraphic discoveries in Saudi Arabia: see Robin, “L’Arabie dans le Coran. Réexamen de quelques termes à la lumière des inscriptions préislamiques”, 36-48.

³⁴ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, vol. 1, 183-184; Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 1, 155. See the analysis of Robin, “L’Arabie dans le Coran”, 39-44.

³⁵ See especially Vajda, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar à l’époque monothéiste*, part 1, chapter *L’occupation éthiopienne de l’Arabie du Sud* (v. 527-575).

³⁶ 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, Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *al-Fitan*, 671-672.

to the occupation of a large part of the Yemen by the Abyssinians³⁷. In the 4th century A.D, the unification of the Yemen under the kingdom of Ḥimyar, by the annexation of the Saba' and Ḥaḍramawt kingdoms, offers 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 kingdom³⁸. In the beginning of the 6th century A.D, South Arabia is, again, conquered by Axum and some sources point out religious motivations, especially the protection of Christian communities in Arabia who underwent a massacre by the Ḥimyarite Jews, better known as the massacre of Najrān³⁹. According to the *Acts of Gregentius*, well studied by Vasilios Christides, Abyssinians are described as brutal and cruel⁴⁰.

Abyssinia appears in most of Syriac and Byzantine apocalyptic traditions, written shortly before Islam⁴¹. 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 is the connection between the events in 6th-century Arabia and the nature of the apocalyptic narratives in early Islam. The Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, written in the late 7th century⁴², includes some interesting narratives, which could be compared to some information given by Muslim apocalypses. Some scholars have shown the influence of this apocalypse on the writing of the *Kebra Nagast*, or *The Glory of the Kings*, an apocryphal Abyssinian text, reassembling a great compilation of legends and traditions, to glorify Caleb⁴³. 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 East⁴⁴.

An old Muslim source, written in the beginning of the 3rd/9th century, gives a better idea of the Abyssinians' image drawn by the Yemeni memory⁴⁵. The text is supposed to have been written

³⁷ Schiettecatte, "L'Arabie du Sud et la mer du III^e siècle av. au VI^e siècle ap. », 254-258.

³⁸ Schiettecatte, "À la veille de l'islam : effondrement ou transformation du monde antique", 12-13.

³⁹ On the massacre of Najrān and its political background, see the detailed study of Robin, "Nağrān vers l'époque du massacre", 39-106.

⁴⁰ Christides, "The Himyarite-Ethiopian war and the Ethiopian occupation of South Arabia in the acts of Gregentius (ca. 530 A.D.)", 127. Gregentius was sent in 525 by the patriarch of Alexandria to assume the post of archbishop of South Arabia in the capital Ṣafār, after its annexation by the Ethiopian Negus Kālēb in 523.

⁴¹ Ubierna, "Recherches sur l'apocalyptique syriaque et byzantine au VII^e siècle" 9-10, 23.

⁴² On the Apocalypse on Pseudo-Methodius, see especially Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 13-51.

⁴³ Shahid, "The Kebra Negast in Light of Recent Research.", 133-178; Lapchik Minski, "The Kebra Nagast and the Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: A Miaphysite Eschatological Tradition"

https://www.academia.edu/28241463/The_Kebra_Nagast_and_the_Syriac_Apocalypse_of_Pseudo-Methodius_A_Miaphysite_Eschatological_Tradition. 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 XII^e siècle, Yemrehanna Krestos", 127-143. Muriel Debié has shown that the aim of the *Kebra Nagast* is to show the eternal supremacy of the Ethiopian royalty on the others, such as Roman or Arab: Debié, "Le Kebra Nagast éthiopien : une réponse apocryphe aux événements de Najran", in *Le massacre de Najrān*, 257-258.

⁴⁴ Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 103.

⁴⁵ Wabḥ b. Munabbih, *Al-Tijān fī mulūk Ḥimyar, riwāyat Ibn Hishām*.

by Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 725 or 737), a scholar and *cadi* of Ṣan‘ā’ in the Umayyad period. Wahb was known as a specialist and transmitter of *Isrā’īliyyāt*, the Biblical traditions about prophets⁴⁶. In the *Tījān*, Wahb gives an interesting information about the royalty of Ḥimyar, son of Saba’. He relates that the Ḥabasha, sons of Kūsh b. Ḥām⁴⁷, went back up the Nile to ruin Egypt, that Ḥimyar faced them in Middle Egypt and finally beat them⁴⁸. The information looks like the one reported by Muslim Apocalypses, and one can wonder if a Yemeni tradition did circulate earlier in Egypt, and influenced apocalyptic narratives⁴⁹.

We have also to keep in mind some battles between Muslims and Abyssinians from the very early decades of Islam. According to al-Wāqidī (d. 822), Shu‘ayba, a small port on the Red Sea, was assaulted by Abyssinian boats in 9/630. A contingent of 300 Muslims ran to defend the port and would have even pursued the Abyssinians at sea⁵⁰. Some similarities between this narrative and the apocalyptic tradition of the Abyssinian invasion could be observed: an Abyssinian invasion by sea, the number of three (300, 3000) and the pursuit of Abyssinians by Muslims. The scenario repeats in 83/702 when Abyssinian ships assaulted Jeddah, on the Red Sea. The attack was pushed away and the Abyssinians were pursued at sea by a Muslim fleet⁵¹. The link between historical events in early Islam (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 aforementioned. In this context, a question remains unanswerable: the positive image drawn by

⁴⁶ A codex on papyrus attributed to Wahb, dated on 229/844, and containing a history of the prophet David, along with some fragments of the *Sīra* (biography of Muḥammad) was found in the collection of Heidleberg, and edited by Khoury: *Wahb b. Munabbih*. On the interest of Wahb for Biblical history, see de Prémare, “Wahb b. Munabbih, une figure singulière du premier islam”, p. 531-549. On *Isrā’īliyyāt*, see Tottoli, “Originis and Use of the Term *Isrā’īliyyāt* in Muslim Literature”, 193-210.

⁴⁷ Kūsh is the most common term to designate Ethiopia in the literary traditions of the region (either Syriac, Arabic, or Coptic). According to the Pseudo-Methodius, Kushyat was the mother of Alexander the Great, Ubierna, “Recherches sur l’apocalypse byzantine et syriaque”, p. 10. On the other hand, Muslim sources connect Kūsh with a biblical ancestry, by means of Kan‘ān, son of Ḥām b. Nūḥ, while they appoint Kūsh as the ancestor of Indians, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Wahb. B. Munabbih, *Tījān*, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁹ It is worth noting that the majority of the first settlers in Fuṣṭāṭ, following the Islamic conquest, were Yemeni, especially from Ḥimyar, Ḥaḍramawt and Ma‘āfir; see Kennedy, “Egypt as a Province of the Islamic Caliphate, 641/868”, in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, vol. 1: Islamic Egypt, 647-1517*, 64. On the importance of Yemeni in the transmission of South Arabian tradition in early Islamic Egypt, see Vadet, “L’« acculturation » des Sud-arabiques à Fuṣṭāṭ au lendemain de la conquête arabe”, 7-14.

⁵⁰ Al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, vol. 3, 983-984.

⁵¹ Cuoq, *L’Islam en Éthiopie*, 36.

Islamic tradition of the Abyssinian king, al-Najāshī (the Negus), due to his reception of Muslim refugees sent by Muḥammad from Mecca to Axūm⁵².

As seen above, the image of Abyssinia in early Islamic Apocalyptic was influenced by other Apocalyptic traditions of the late Antique 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 tribulation⁵³”. Most of the apocalyptic material used by Muslim scholars was borrowed from the intellectual sphere of the Near-eastern cultures. In the latter, Abyssinians were a main crux in the perception of the end of the world.

Nevertheless, Islamic tradition seems to have drawn some references from the recent past of the Arabic Peninsula, and the deep struggle between the kingdoms of Ḥimyar (in Yemen) and Axūm. The most important transmitters of Apocalyptic material in early Islamic Egypt were Yemeni: they acted as agents of a “collective memory”⁵⁴ which was probably written since the end of the Umayyad period, with the book of Wahb, *al-Tījān fī mulūk Ḥimyar*. One can assume the establishment of a triangular network of historical tradition between Abyssinia, South Arabia and Egypt. Quite surprisingly, the Christian kingdom of Nubia is completely omitted in this early network dominated by 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.

The presence of Yemeni scholars in Fustāt seems to have played an important role in the writing of the first Muslim books regarding Apocalyptic: the *Ṣaḥīfa* of Ibn Lahī‘a and *al-Fitan* of Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād. The latter clearly chose to settle in Egypt thanks to the existence of such a knowledge, both oral and written⁵⁵. The early interest of Egyptian scholars in Apocalyptic is confirmed by a note related to Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb (d. 128/745), considered as the main Egyptian authority in his time. It asserts that, before Yazīd undertook studies and reflexion on legal matters (*al-‘ilm wa al-kalām fī al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām*), Egyptian scholars were solely versed in

⁵² 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 learders. See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, vol. 1, 349-366; Montgomery Watt, *Mahomet*, 142-150.

⁵³ Bashear, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars”, 173.

⁵⁴ On this concept, created by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1930’s, see Nora, “La mémoire collective”, in *La nouvelle histoire*, 398-401.

⁵⁵ Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar*, vol. 10, 599. It is worth noting that the two manuscripts of the *Fitan* were transmitted in 288/900 by an Egyptian scholar called ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥātim al-Murādī; 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.

Apocalyptic (*al-malāḥim wa al-fitan*)⁵⁶. Exhaustive investigation on the scholarship milieu of Fustāt in the first century of Islam would better enlight the reading (and probably the translation) of ancient masterpieces of Apocalyptic literature⁵⁷, the composition of an Islamic tradition in this genre, along with – which would be even more interesting – the writing of a history in the glory of pre-Islamic Yemen in the capital of Islamic Egypt⁵⁸.

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⁵⁶ Ibn Yūnus, *Tārīkh Ibn Yūnus*, vol. 1, 509.

⁵⁷ On this point, see the suggestive ideas of Cook, "An Early Muslim Daniel Apocalypse", 57-66.

⁵⁸ The pre-fatimid literature of Fustāt contains a significant corpus of poetry related to the glory of some royal lineages of Ḥimyar and Ḥaḍramawt. See for instance al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, pp. 425-426.

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