

ART. II.—*A Brief Account of Four Arabic Works on the History and Geography of Arabia.* By Captain S. B. MILES.

Read April 29th, 1872.

I venture to lay before the Society a brief notice of four Arabic MS. works on the History and Geography of Arabia, which appear to me sufficiently interesting from their rarity and the nature of their contents to merit attention.

The political history of the Arabs divides itself naturally into two epochs; the Preislamic and the Mohammedan or historical period. The former, at least so far as we are acquainted with it, comprised three empires, of which the earliest, and unquestionably the most important, was the Himyar dynasty of Yemen. The chronicles of this state would, had they been fortunately preserved to us, probably have furnished one of the most instructive and entertaining chapters in the history of mankind; but they are so enveloped in fable, and the sources of trustworthy information are so exceedingly scant and fragmentary, that no researches have yet availed to dissipate entirely the gloom that hangs over that period, and it remains buried in as profound an obscurity as that of any other country of the East. A great advance, however, has been made of late years in increasing the materials of Arabian research, and the ultimate recovery of at least a considerable portion of this lost history is by no means to be despaired of. There is good reason to believe that various historical MSS. of more or less value, but as yet unknown to Europeans, still exist in Arabia, and that from the oral traditions and legends of the people, especially of the Himyar tribes, which have been only very partially investigated, much may yet be gleaned; but the field in which we may expect to find the most ample materials for the reconstruction of the ancient edifice obviously lies in the ruined cities of S.W. Arabia, now known to abound in inscriptions in stone and bronze and other historical monu-

ments of the Himyaritic empire, which, when brought to light and interpreted, cannot fail to yield very important accessions to our knowledge. Several specimens, too, of Himyaritic coins—the key to the country's history, and regarding the very existence of which so much doubt has hitherto been felt—have been recently obtained; and, as our store of them increases, will, by their unerring and concurrent testimony, be of no slight service in elucidating it. It is much to be hoped that before long an exploration of the country may be undertaken, and its hidden treasures drawn forth and made available; but in the mean time every additional ray of light, however small, that can be thrown on its history cannot but be welcome.

For the modern history of Yemen, on the other hand, our materials are much more abundant and authentic; and it is somewhat surprising that there is yet no work in any of the languages of Europe that gives a full and connected account of the affairs of that region from the time of the prophet Mohammed. The only attempt of the kind that I know of is Playfair's "History of Yemen," which, though useful, is but a bare outline of events.

The few MSS. I am attempting to describe are well worthy the attention of students of Arabian history and literature, and fully deserve, I think, to be edited and translated. The names of them are:—The *Iklil fi Ansab*, of *Hassan bin Ahmed el Hamdani*; the *Kitab el Jexireh* of the same author; the *Tarikh el Mostabsir* of *Ibn el Mojawir*, and the *Kurrat el Oyün* of *El Dubbi*.

It is not my intention to analyze these works; but in order to give a fair conception of their contents, I translate most of the rubrics or heads of chapters of each.

The first of them, the *Iklil*, is described by Hajji Khalfa as a great work, and a wealth of learning, and though it certainly contains a good deal of astrological trash, appears to deserve his encomiums. It is a repertory of all the information that could be collected on the subject of the Himyarites at the time the author wrote, about three centuries subsequent to the fall of that dynasty. It is, I am persuaded, the same

work that was met with by Baron Wrede during his journey in Hadramaut, and from which he transcribed the list of kings and tobbas given in the edition of his Travels lately published by the Baron von Maltzan.

The second is a very admirable description of Arabia and its people, more particularly of the S.W. portion, and is, I should say, of the best class of Arab geographies. It is a book rarely met with even in Arabia, and only one copy has, I believe, as yet reached Europe. The present volume is an 8vo. of 496 pages of 17 lines in a page, and contains also a copy of Nishwan's *Kasideh* and its commentary.

These two works of Hamdani are a mine of information on the early history and geography of Arabia, and unquestionably present many new and important materials. His intimate acquaintance with the various tribes and the physical features of the country is especially noteworthy. Hamdani was presumably one of the most learned men of his age, and must have been an indefatigable collector of knowledge, for if he did not himself visit the places he describes in Yemen, he managed at least to gather together a very unusual store of information regarding them, and he must take a high rank among the native historians of that land. Very little seems to be known of his life, the celebrated *Es Soyuti* being apparently the only one who has collected any information respecting him. The cause of this may have been partly on account of his heterodox opinions, as he is known to have been rather a free-thinker in matters of religion, an offence that would have sufficed to insure his exclusion from Moslem biographies. Hammer-Purgstall, in his *Literatur-Geschichte der Araber*, quoting from *Es Soyuti's Lives of the Grammarians*, tells us that Hamdani was born and brought up at Sanaa, wandered thence to Mecca, where he sojourned some time, then returned to Yemen, and settled himself at Sada, where he died A.H. 334; that he embraced all knowledge, and was a living encyclopædia of grammar, poetry, genealogy, history, astronomy, astrology, and geometry, and was also a physician. He was the author of at least ten works, many of which are given by Hajji Khalifa. Their names are as follows: (1.) The

Iklil fi Ansab, or Crown of Genealogies. (2.) The Book of Animals. (3.) The Book of Archery. (4.) The Book of Battle days. (5.) The Book of Roads and Kingdoms. (6.) The Description of Arabia. (7.) The Wonders of Yemen. (8.) The *Diwan Hassan*, a collection of poetry, in six volumes. (9.) The *Kasideh ed Damighat*. (10.) The *Zij el Hamdani*, astronomical tables. (11.) The *Sirr el Hikmet*. Of these, the fifth and sixth are, I suspect, but one and the same work under different titles, as the latter is not named by any author. Two only of all his compositions appear to have come down to us, the others have probably not been preserved. Hamdani's full name was *Abu Mohammed Hassan bin Ahmed bin Yacoob bin Eusof bin Daood el Hamdani el Yemeni*, and he was commonly known by the name of *Ibn Haik*.

From the title-page of the eighth volume of the *Iklil* I give the following list of contents of the ten books composing that work:—

1st Volume.—Abridged account of the beginning and origin of the Genealogies.

2nd Vol.—Progeny of Hamaisa bin Himyar.

3rd Vol.—The branches of Kahtan.

4th Vol.—On ancient history to the time of Tobba Abi Karib.

5th Vol.—On mediæval history from the first days of Asaad Tobba to the days of Dhu Nowas.

6th Vol.—On later history to the Islam.

7th Vol.—On some absurd accounts and impossible anecdotes of the Prophet.

8th Vol.—Account of the palaces of the Himyars, their cities and courts, and what has been preserved of their poetry.

9th Vol.—On the proverbs of the Himyars, and the prophecies in their language and musnad character.

10th Vol.—Account of Hashid and Bakail.

Contents of Volume VIII.—Chapter on what has come down to us concerning the palaces (قصور) of Yemen.—Account of Sanaa and its citadel Ghumdân.—Of Dhofar the

celebrated and its citadel.—The palace of Kaukeban.—The onyx mines in Yemen.—Account of Irem.—Of Nait.—Of the royal palace of Yaruk.—Of Mareb and Saba.—Of the palace of Natheed on Ras Asser.—Of Beit Hanbas and its ruins.—Of Debil.—Shehrâr.—Beinoon in Ans.—Dâmigh between Sanaa and Dhamar.—The Wadi Zohr.—Of Reâm and the place of eruption of fire.—Account of the mosques of Yemen.—Account of Gheiman, in which are the tombs of Himyar kings.—Of Musna, Hadha and Bu Hadha.—Of Sirwah, and what the poets have said of it.—Of Hidkan.—Ridaa.—Shibâm.—Najar.—Moukal.—Hakir.—Adhra.—Sarw.—The palace of Dhilan.—Of Rauthan.—The palaces of Shahi, one of the wonders of Yemen.—Of Khamir, one of the wonders of Hamdan.—Of Tulkum, one of the most ancient palaces of Yemen.—Of Shaoob and its palaces.—Ekla and its vast ruins.—Maeen.—Barakish and Baidha.—Souda and many other places.—The book of Dams or Bunds of the Himyars.—The dam of Mareb.—The dam of Khanik at Sada.—The dam of Riân and Niseân, and many others in Yemen and Hamdan.—Chapter on the treasures of Yemen and where they are hidden.—Chapter on the musnad character or writing of the Himyarites.—Chapter on the sepulchres of the Himyars and the inscriptions found in them.—Sepulchre of Hood in Hadramaut.—Of Abdulla bin Thamir, and others.—Account of the elegies of the Himyarites.—On Kahtan.—Saba bin Yeshgob.—Himyar, Suksuk bin Wail.—Moghâfir.—Shedad, and others.

Contents of Volume X.—This volume gives the origin and genealogy of the Hâshid and Bakail tribes, and contains also a short account of that province and of Hamdan.—It also contains a treatise on the mines of gems and metals in Yemen, in which the localities of about sixty are given, including ten gold and eleven silver mines.

The Kitâb Jazret el Arab.

Contents.—Introduction.—On the climates of Hermes Trismegistus.—The climates of Ptolemy.—The latitudes and longitudes of the cities of Arabia.—Description of the

inhabited regions of Arabia.—Account of Yemen and Socotra.—Account of Aden, the most ancient emporium of Arabia.—Account of Sanaa, the mother of Yemen.—The wadies and mountains of Yemen.—Account of Hadramaut and Beled Kindah.—The townships or districts of Yemen.—The Tehama and the land of Oman.—The plants of Yemen.—The languages of Arabia.—Account of El Yemamah, its climate and productions.—Description of the Jôf.—Account of Bahrein.—Celebrated places between Yemen and Nejd.—Chapter on the towns of mixed population between Irak and Sham and Yemen.—Ancient emporia of Arabia.—Highways of El Irak.—Routes from Sanaa.—Routes from Aden.—Routes in Hadramaut.—Wonders of Yemen not to be found elsewhere.—The divisions of the peninsula of Arabia.—Extracts from ancient geographical poems.

The next work, the *Tarikh el Mostabsir*, of *Mohammed bin Yacoub ibn el Mojawir el Shami el Baghdadi*, commonly called *El Kâtib*, is a curious topographical work descriptive of South Arabia, unsystematic perhaps in its arrangement, but interesting and valuable from being the result of personal observation, and from the simplicity and minuteness of detail with which the author records his facts. It is a very useful companion to the geography of Hamdani, as it illustrates certain points on which the latter was not well informed, as for instance, the little known country between Yemen and Oman, on which he throws great light. Besides the geographical part, also, the author describes the manners and customs of the people, and gives other information nowhere else to be met with. The book is indeed eminently readable, and would well bear translation. I know nothing of the author except that he travelled a good deal in Arabia, and died about A.H. 650. Copies are very scarce, and it is I believe almost unknown in Yemen.

Contents.—Account of Mecca, its names, history, etc.—Some manners and customs of Mecca.—Description of Taief.—Account of El Hejaz.—Historical account and description of Jedda.—Historical account and description of Zebeed.—Description of Bab el Mandeb.—Magnificence of the Moud-

zeria.—Routes from Aara.—Account of Aden in ancient times.—Of its gate and aqueduct.—The building of Aden.—The kings of Ajam or Aden.—Description of Aden, its walls and wells.—Of its commerce, revenue and trade in slave-girls.—Destruction of Aden.—Building of Dumlooha.—Description of Taiez.—Description of Jebel Sabbar.—Wonders of Yemen.—Building of Sanaa.—Citadel of Ghumdân.—Description of Sanaa.—Wonders of Dhamar.—Description of marriage ceremony there.—Routes and stages from Sanaa.—Account of the dam of Mareb, called El Mâzameen.—Routes and stages from Mareb.—Destruction of ancient Sada.—Building of Sada.—Routes and stages from Sada.—The Tehama.—Account of Nejd.—Marriage ceremonies in Nejd.—Routes and stages from Zebeed.—Building of Ahwab.—Account and description of Shibam.—Route from Shibam to Dhofar.—Destruction of Dhofar.—Account of ancient road.—Account of the Island of Socotra.—Route from Munsoora to Merbat.—Account of the Mahra tribe.—Of the Ibadhia sect.—From Munsoora to Aden.—Description of Kalhât.—From Kalhât to Muscat.—Of Sohar.—Of Dar el Kheima.—Of the Island of Kais and the pearl fishery.

The last work I have to describe is on the modern history of Yemen, and comprises a period of about nine hundred years from the introduction of Islam to the time the author wrote. It is the *Kitâb Kurrat el Oyûn bil Khabar el Yemen el Maimoon*, by the *Shaikh Abdurrahman bin Ali el Dubbi el Sheibani el Zebeedi*, and is a very useful epitome of events in that region. It appears to have been compiled almost exclusively from the valuable work of *El Khuzraji*, of which it may be considered an abridgment; however, it brings down the history to about a century later. It is one of the best known and commonest histories of Yemen to be met with.

Contents.—Chapter I. On Yemen and the kings of Sanaa and Aden.

Section 1. On Yemen and its dependencies.—Sec. 2. On the introduction of Islam into Yemen.—Sec. 3. On events after the death of the Prophet.—Sec. 4. On events under the Beni Umiyah.—Sec. 5.—On events under the

Abassiya.—Sec. 6. Of the Karmatians in Yemen and Ali bin Fadil.—Sec. 7. Of the independent princes of Sanaa.—Sec. 8. Of the sway of the Sulehiya.—Sec. 9. Of the kings of Sanaa after the Sulehiya.—Sec. 10. On events under the Zuraiya and the conquest of Aden.

Chapter II. Account of Zebeed.

Section 1. The rise of Zebeed and its possession by the Beni Zeeâd.—Sec. 2. The Abyssinians in Yemen.—Sec. 3. The Wezeers of the Nejash.—Sec. 4. Of Ibn Mehdi and decline of the Abyssinians.—Sec. 5. The dynasty of the Beni Ayoob.—Sec. 6. The Russooliya dynasty. Reign of Sultan Nooruddin Abi el Fatah.—Sec. 7. Of the reign of Sultan Melek el Mozuffer Shemsuddin Eusof.—Sec. 8. Of the reign of Sultan Melek el Ashraf.—Sec. 9. Of the reign of Melek el Moid Hizbur-uddin Daood.—Sec. 10. Of the reign of Melek el Mojahid Seif el Islam.—Sec. 11. Of the reign of Melek el Afthal.—Sec. 12. Of the reign of Melek el Ashraf Ismail.—Sec. 13. Of the reign of Melek el Nasir Ahmed.—Sec. 14. Of the reign of Melek el Mansoor Abdulla.—Sec. 15. Of the reign of Melek el Ashraf Nasir.—Sec. 16. Of the reign of Melek el Tahir Yehia.—Sec. 17. Of the reign of Melek el Ashraf Ismail.—Sec. 18. Of those who succeeded the Âl Ghossan. Reign of Mozuffer Eusof Ibn Mansoor.

Chapter III. The dynasty of the Beni Tahir.

Section 1. Of the reign of Melek el Mojahid Shemsuddin and Melek el Dhâfir Salâh uddin Ammir.—Sec. 2. Of the reign of Melek el Mansoor Tajuddin.—Sec. 3. Of the reign of Sultan Melek el Dhâfir Salâh uddin.

GUADUB, 20th February, 1872.