

Socotra, when he says that among the nations visited by the missionary Theophilus, in the time of Constantius, were "the Assyrians on the verge of the outer ocean towards the East . . . whom Alexander the Great, after driving them from Syria, sent thither to settle, and to this day they keep their mother tongue, though all of the blackest, through the power of the sun's rays." The Arab voyagers of the 9th century say that the island was colonised with Greeks by Alexander the Great, in order to promote the culture of the Socotrine aloes; when the other Greeks adopted Christianity these did likewise, and they had continued to retain their profession of it. The colonising by Alexander is probably a fable, but invented to account for facts.

[Edrisi says (*Jaubert's transl.* pp. 47, *seqq.*) that the chief produce of Socotra is aloes, and that most of the inhabitants of this island are Christians; for this reason: when Alexander had subjugated Porus, his master Aristotle gave him the advice to seek after the island producing aloes; after his conquest of India, Alexander remembered the advice, and on his return journey from the Sea of India to the Sea of Oman, he stopped at Socotra, which he greatly admired for its fertility and the pleasantness of its climate. Acting on the advice of Aristotle, Alexander removed the inhabitants from their island, and established in their place a colony of Ionians, to whom he entrusted the care of cultivating aloes. These Greeks were converted when the Christian religion was preached to them, and their descendants have remained Christians.—H. C.]

In the list of the metropolitan Sees of the Nestorian Church we find one called *Kotrobah*, which is supposed to stand for Socotra. According to Edrisi, *Kotrobah* was an island inhabited by Christians; he speaks of Socotra separately, but no island suits his description of *Kotrobah* but Socotra itself; and I suspect that we have here geography in duplicate, no uncommon circumstance. There is an epistle extant from the Nestorian Patriarch Jesuabius (A.D. 650–660), *ad Episcopos Catarensiūm*, which Assemani interprets of the Christians in Socotra and the adjacent coasts of Arabia (III. 133).* Abulfeda says the people of Socotra were Nestorian Christians and pirates. Nicolo Conti, in the first half of the 15th century, spent two months on the island (*Sechutera*). He says it was for the most part inhabited by Nestorian Christians.

[Professor W. R. Smith, in a letter to Sir H. Yule, dated Cambridge, 15th June, 1886, writes: "The authorities for *Kotrobah* seem to be (1) Edrisi, (2) the list of Nestorian Bishops in Assemani. There is no trace of such a name anywhere else that I can find. But there is a place called *Ḳaṭar* about which most of the Arab Geographers know very little, but which is mentioned in poetry. Bekri, who seems best informed, says that it lay between Bahrain and Oman. . . . *Iṣṭakhri* and *Ibn Ḥaukal* speak of the *Ḳaṭar* pirates. Their collective name is the *Ḳaṭarīya*."]

Some indications point rather to a connection of the island's Christianity with the Jacobite or Abyssinian Church. Thus they practised circumcision, as mentioned by Maffei in noticing the proceedings of Albuquerque at Socotra. De Barros calls them Jacobite Christians of the Abyssinian stock. Barbosa speaks of them as an olive-coloured people, Christian only in name, having neither baptism nor Christian knowledge, and having for many years lost all acquaintance with the Gospel. Andrea Corsali calls them Christian shepherds of Ethiopian race, like Abyssinians. They lived on dates, milk,* and butter; some rice was imported. They had churches like mosques, but with altars in Christian fashion.

When Francis Xavier visited the island there were still distinct traces of the Church. The people revered the cross, placing it on their altars, and hanging it round their necks. Every village had its minister, whom they called *Kashís* (*Ar.* for a Christian Presbyter), to whom they paid tithes. No man could read. The *Kashís* repeated prayers antiphonically in a forgotten tongue, which De Barros calls Chaldee, frequently scattering incense; a word like *Alleluia* often recurred. For bells they used wooden rattles. They assembled in their churches four times a day,

* [Assemani, in his corrections (III. p. 362), gives up *Socotra* in favour of *Bactria*.]