

*ahl Khurāsān* are used more commonly to designate the nucleus of the ‘Abbāsīd army. It is only in accounts beginning with the onset of the civil war that the term *abnā’ al-dawla* appears with any frequency. This does not refute their claim to a special status, but it does serve to restrict that claim to the inhabitants of Baghdad at the requisite time, for whom such an assertion was sustainable. The caliphal move to Sāmarrā’ eventually weakened their position and rendered their claim moot. References to the *abnā’ al-dawla* disappear before the end of the Sāmarrān interlude. The term *abnā’* is used in a variety of permutations to indicate a connection to a larger grouping that is not necessarily genealogical. One finds *abnā’ ahl Khurāsān*, *abnā’ al-dawla*, *abnā’ al-Shī’a*, *abnā’ al-Atrāk*, all indicating a connection to a larger entity, whether geographic, political, religious, or ethnic.

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## Abraha

**Abraha** was a Christian king of South Arabia in the middle of the sixth century C.E. According to Muslim sources, he attacked Mecca with the “People of the Elephant” in about 570 C.E.

The name “Abraha” is said in Muslim sources to be of Abyssinian origin, meaning “bright face” (*wajh abyad*; see Ibn Hishām, *al-Tījān*, 136; Ibn Sa‘īd, 1:119). Islamic reports often add to Abraha’s name the nickname al-Ashram (“Split-Nose”). The tip of his nose is said to have been cut off during a duel with his rival, Aryāṭ, in Yemen (see below). According to another explanation (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *sh-r-m*), a stone struck his nose during the “Expedition of the Elephant.”

Abraha is also referred to as Ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ and as Abū Yaksūm, but some doubts have been raised about whether all these references were to the same person. In fact, Yahyā b. Sallām (d. 200/815) suggests two different identities of the person who raided Mecca with the “People of the Elephant.” He was either Abraha b. al-Ṣabbāḥ, a Yemeni whom the Abyssinians appointed as a king in Yemen, or he was the Abyssinian Abū Yaksūm (Hūd b. Muḥakkam, 4:534). Al-Suhaylī (d. 581/1185) has deduced from these versions that the Ḥimyarī (Yemeni) Abraha b. al-Ṣabbāḥ is not the Abyssinian Abū Yaksūm (al-Suhaylī, 1:54).

The name “Abraha b. al-Ṣabbāḥ” refers not only to the king with the elephant but also to an earlier king in Yemen, who reportedly reigned at least 150 years before Abraha of the Elephant. The former is said to have been a great scholar and leader. Both Abraha b. al-Ṣabbāḥ and the later Abraha appear on a list of Yemeni kings recorded by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889). The later Abraha is called al-Ashram (Ibn

Qutayba, 276–7; see also al-Ya‘qūbī, 1:199–200; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 2:77–8).

A yet earlier Abraha is mentioned among the first generations of the kings of Ḥimyar, the descendants of Qaḥṭān. The king called Abraha b. al-Rā‘ish, with the nickname Dhū l-Manār (e.g., Ibn Qutayba, 272; Ibn Ḥabīb, 364) is said to have been named for the biblical Abraham (Ibn Hishām, *Tījān*, 136; de Prémare, 310).

The sources usually treat the Abraha of the Expedition of the Elephant and Abū Yaksūm as one and the same person. His career as related in the Islamic sources (discussed in detail in de Prémare, 296–301) began when Abyssinian forces raided Yemen from the sea and gained control over the kingdom of Ḥimyar. The raid was designed primarily to end the persecution of Christians in South Arabia. The Abyssinian commander was Aryāt, though in Ibn Bukayr’s version he is given the (Persian?) name “Rūzabah,” and Abraha accompanied him (Ibn Bukayr, 59; for Ibn Bukayr’s version, see also de Prémare, 327–33). Other versions maintain that the commander was Abraha and that Aryāt was sent later to ensure Abraha’s loyalty to the Negus (the king of Abyssinia). Eventually Abraha killed Aryāt (Rūzabah) and established himself as king of Yemen. He also obtained the support of the Negus, who at first intended to revenge Aryāt’s blood.

In some reports on the history of Mecca and its Quraysh tribe in pre-Islamic times, Abraha (or rather Abū Yaksūm) emerges as a prominent ruler. Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/819) mentions one of the Quraysh, al-Ḥārith b. ‘Alqama, who was a hostage (*rahīna*) of the Quraysh handed over to Abū Yaksūm the Abyssinian (Ibn al-Kalbī, *Jamharat al-nasab*, 67). The Quraysh surrendered him to Abū Yaksūm, who agreed in return not to sever the commercial relations between his

kingdom and Mecca. The need for the surrender of hostages arose after some merchants from Abū Yaksūm’s country had been robbed in Mecca (al-Balādhurī, 9:4026; Kister, 429–30). Another hostage with Abū Yaksūm, ‘Utbān b. Mālik of the Thaḳīf tribe, was from al-Ṭā‘if, east-southeast of Mecca (al-Balādhurī, 13:5716; Kister, 430–1).

Abraha is said to have reigned as king in Yemen for twenty or twenty-three years and to have been succeeded by his son Yaksūm and then by another son, Masrūq. The latter was the last Abyssinian king of Yemen before the Persians took control (Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, 16:73, 75; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, 260).

The sources provide some details about Abraha’s offspring. Rayḥāna, “daughter of al-Ashram al-Ḥabashī [the Abyssinian],” is said to have given birth to Abraha b. al-Ṣabbāḥ, “king of Tihāma [along the Red Sea coast].” His brother was Khayr b. al-Ṣabbāḥ (Ibn al-Kalbī, *Jamharat al-nasab*, 2:542; cf. Ibn Ḥazm, 435). Another daughter of Abraha, sister of Masrūq, was Basbāsa (al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, 1:933; ed. Ibrāhīm, 2:130). A nephew of al-Ashram, named Yaksūm, is said to have given the Prophet some kind of weapon as a gift (Ibn Manẓūr, s.v. *q-t-r*).

Abraha is known in the Islamic sources mainly for his abortive attack on the Ka‘ba at Mecca. The sources give the following reasons for his campaign against Mecca (surveyed in detail by de Prémare, 311f.): Abraha erected in Ṣan‘ā’ a monumental church—called in Arabic al-Qullays (or al-Qalīs)—using materials extracted from ancient temples in Ma‘rib. He dedicated it to the Negus, with the intention of making it a pilgrimage center for all Arabs, in place of the Ka‘ba in Mecca. Some versions assert that his building was designed as a

Ka'ba on its own (Ibn Bukayr, 60; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣnām*, 46–7). According to Yāqūt, Abraha's monument was known as *al-ka'ba l-yamāniyya*, and an idol named al-Khalaṣa was placed inside it (Yāqūt, 2:383). People of North Arabian tribes of the Kināna, of the *nasa'a*—those charged with the duty of deciding on intercalation (*nasi'*)—were determined to prevent the decline of Mecca as a pilgrimage center and desecrated the church. In response, Abraha decided to attack Mecca with an elephant and destroy the Ka'ba. The elephant is said to have been supplied by the Negus. Abraha's army reportedly consisted of forces from South Arabian tribes, that is 'Akk, al-Ash'ar, and Khath'am (Ibn Bukayr, 61).

In other versions, the theme of building a substitute for the Ka'ba is absent, and the reason for Abraha's attack on the Ka'ba was merely retaliation for the looting by Meccan Arabs of a church in Najrān, in South Arabia (Ibn Abī Hātim, 10:3464).

On his way north, Abraha is said to have passed through the settlements of various tribes from which he took prisoners, who were forced to act as his guides. Abraha's army is said eventually to have passed through al-Tā'if, and the local people of the tribe of Thaqīf informed him that the temple he sought was in Mecca. They sent a guide with him, named Abū Righāl. When they reached al-Mughhamas, a short distance from Mecca, Abū Righāl died and was buried there (for al-Mughhamas, see de Prémare, 334–5). The Arabs have made it a practice to stone his grave ever since. In that place, the elephant knelt down and refused to proceed, and God destroyed the army.

A peculiar version is recorded in the *Tafsīr* of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), who speaks of two campaigns against Mecca that involved an elephant. The

first was initiated by the Yemeni Abraha b. al-Ashram; he dispatched his son Abū Yaksūm—who is called al-Yamānī al-Ḥabashī (“the Abyssinian Yemeni”)—with an army and an elephant, in order to make the elephant an idol in place of the Ka'ba, which they planned to destroy. The elephant refused to advance on the Ka'ba, and the army eventually retreated. The second attack was attempted a year or two later. Some Quraysh traders went to Abyssinia and camped in a Christian church not far from the beach. They roasted meat and left the fire burning, and the church went up in flames. The Negus was enraged and set out with his army and elephant toward Mecca. He was accompanied by “kings” of Kinda (an originally South Arabian tribal group), among them Abū Yaksūm al-Kindī and Abraha b. al-Ṣabbāḥ al-Kindī. The defeat of the army came when birds attacked it, pelting it with stones (Muqātil b. Sulaymān, 4:847–54; see also de Prémare, 311–25).

The sources name 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Muḥammad's grandfather, as the leader of the Quraysh, who bravely stood up to Abraha and never lost his faith in God's help against the invading troops.

The memory of the campaign against Mecca was preserved in the term “The Year of the Elephant” (usually dated to 570 C.E.), which became the starting point for the chronology of the remaining pre-Islamic history of Mecca, as Muḥammad's *hijra* marks the beginning of the Islamic era. Some traditions say that Muhammad's birth, which is usually given as 570 C.E., coincided with the Year of the Elephant, while others hold that he was born 23 or 40 years after the Year of the Elephant, which would put the Year of the Elephant at sometime between about 530 and 547 C.E. (Rubin, 199f.).

Survivors of the “People of the Elephant” are said to have been sixty members of the tribe of Ḥarb b. Ḥumays b. Udd. It is claimed that the number of their descendants remained fixed at sixty down through the ages (al-Balādhurī, 11:4935).

The earliest known Islamic allusion to Abraha’s campaign against Mecca is in the *Sūrat al-Fīl* (Qur’ān 105), which alludes to a divine disaster inflicted on the “People of the Elephant.” God frustrated their evil plot and sent flocks of birds to pelt them with stones, and they became like “straw eaten up.” Muslim exegetes are unanimous that the “People of the Elephant” are Abraha’s troops who attacked the Ka’ba.

Earlier references seem to have been preserved in pre-Islamic poetry, mainly in some *qaṣīdas*, which, according to al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869), are of undisputed Jāhīlī (pre-Islamic) origin (al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, 7:196–8). One of the *qaṣīdas* is by Abū Qays Ṣayfī b. al-Aslat (Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, 1:60). The poet praises God for his succor “on the day of the elephant of the Abyssinians” (*yawma fīlī l-ḥubūshī*). The poet says that whenever the Abyssinians urged the elephant forward it held its ground, even though they drove their hooks into its flanks and split its nose (*sharramū anfahu*), using a knife as a whip. Instead, it turned and faced the way it had come. Then God sent a wind bringing a shower of pebbles (*ḥāṣīb*) from above. Their priests (*aḥbāruhum*) urged them to endure, but they bleated like sheep. In other verses by the same poet (al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, 7:197), an “ingenuous test” (*balā’un muṣaddaḡun*) is mentioned, which God gave the Quraysh on “the morning of Abū Yaksūm, the leader of the squadrons.” God’s armies caused them to retreat, pelting them and covering them with dust. They hastened to withdraw with regret, but only a few of them reached their

homes. Al-Jāhīz quotes a verse of the Jāhīlī poet Ṭufayl al-Ghanawī, which mentions a certain place near Mecca in which “the elephant disobeyed his masters” (al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, 7:197).

These and other verses that al-Jāhīz considers genuinely pre-Islamic (al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, 7:197–9) are indeed free of Qur’ānic vocabulary and style—even the description of the divine punishment lacks Qur’ānic phrases—and seem to preserve a pre-Islamic myth of Abū Yaksūm and the elephant that refused to march on the Ka’ba and of the divine punishment inflicted on the army. The Qur’ān has turned the theme into a typical “punishment story,” like those concerning ‘Ād and Thamūd, which are also based on local Arabian lore. The opening words of the *Sūrat al-Fīl* (i.e., *a-lam tara kayfa fa’ala rabbuka*) recur in a passage about ‘Ād (Q 89:6). This link between the two passages was already noticed by al-Jāhīz (*Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, 7:200).

Tradition has turned the divine punishment into the cause of Abraha’s death. According to Ibn Ishāq, Abraha was smitten in his body, and on his retreat from Mecca, his fingers fell off one by one. When he died in Ṣan’ā’ his heart burst from his body. Some versions assert that only Abraha was smitten in his body, not the other South Arabian soldiers, who at one point refused to attack the Ka’ba, recognising its sacred character (Ibn Bukayr, 63–4). Other reports say that Abraha did not reach Yemen and died near Mecca, in a place called Dhāt ‘Ushsh (al-Bakrī, 2:944).

The sources see in the defeat of Abraha on the outskirts of Mecca a sign of divine protection bestowed on Mecca and the Quraysh. Ibn Ishāq relates that this event led the Arabs to admire the Quraysh as

a sacred community, and he calls them “people of God” (*ahl Allāh*) (Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 1:59).

In Islamic times, however, Abraha became a source of pride for black Muslims who saw in this king a mighty hero who succeeded in humiliating the Quraysh. This comes out in an epistle (*risāla*) by al-Jāhīz showing blacks (*al-sūdān*) boasting of their superiority over whites (*al-bīḍān*). Some verses are adduced here that say that the Quraysh for all their might could not prevent Abū Yaksūm from raiding their land, and it was God alone who could protect them (al-Jāhīz, *al-Rasāʾil*, 1:182–6). Another verse describes Abraha as “the greatest king,” and another one praises Abū Yaksūm as surpassing any immortal creature, if ever there was one (al-Jāhīz, *al-Rasāʾil*, 1:197–8).

As for the evidence of non-Islamic sources (Beeston; Robin; de Prémare, 289–95), the Byzantine historian Procopius writes in the sixth-century C.E. that Hellestheaios, king of Abyssinia, invaded South Arabia a few years before 531 C.E., killed its king, appointed a puppet ruler named Esimiphaios, and returned to Abyssinia; subsequently, Abyssinian deserters who had remained in South Arabia revolted against Esimiphaios and set on the throne Abraha, originally the slave of a Byzantine merchant of Adulis; two expeditions sent by Hellestheaios against the rebels were unsuccessful, and Abraha retained the throne; Justinian’s attempts to incite Abraha to attack Persia were in vain, for he merely marched a short distance north and then retreated; so long as Hellestheaios was alive, Abraha refused to pay tribute to Abyssinia but agreed to do so to Hellestheaios’s successor.

A long inscription of Abraha found on the Maʿrib dam records the quelling of

an insurrection supported by a son of the dethroned Esimiphaios in the year 657 of the Sabaeen era (640–50 C.E.); repairs effected to the dam later in the same year; the reception of embassies from Abyssinia, Byzantium, Persia, al-Ḥīra, and Ḥārith b. Jabalat, the phylarch of Arabia; and the completion of repairs to the dam in 658.

Another inscription was discovered in South Arabia in 1951, the Murayghān inscription (Ryckmans, no. 506), describing Abraha’s military campaign in central Arabia against the Arab tribes of Maʿadd and mentioning a victory over a tribal confederation of the ʿĀmir b. Ṣaʿsaʿa. The inscription is dated 662 of the Sabaeen era (the late forties or early fifties of the sixth century C.E.); it cannot be later than 554 C.E., because it mentions al-Mundhir—who was assassinated that year—as king of al-Ḥīra.

Neither the Kaʿba nor Mecca is mentioned in the inscription, highlighting the gap between the Abraha of the inscription and the Islamic Abraha of the Elephant. While the former is triumphant, the latter is a wretched victim of God’s wrath.

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URI RUBIN

## Abū Ḥaḥṣ ‘Umar al-Hintātī

**Abū Ḥaḥṣ ‘Umar** b. Yahyā **al-Hintātī** (c. 482–571/1090–1175 or 1176) was a chief architect of the Almohad (al-Muwaḥḥidūn) empire and a close companion of the Maḥdī of the Almohads, Ibn Tūmart, and his successors. His original Berber name was Faskāt ū-Mzāl Intī. Ibn Tūmart changed his name to Abū Ḥaḥṣ, the name borne by one of the Companions of the prophet Muḥammad. Abū Ḥaḥṣ had established his family as one that was consistently loyal to the original Almohad unitarian doctrine (*tawḥīd*) of Ibn Tūmart. Abū Ḥaḥṣ’s grandson Abū Zakariyyā’ Yahyā b. ‘Abd al-Waḥīd broke away from Ibn Tūmart’s Mu’minid successors, who had altered elements of the original Almohad doctrine, and founded the Ḥaḥṣid dynasty (r. 627–982/1229–1574), in the region of modern-day Tunisia.

Abū Ḥaḥṣ was chief of the powerful Hintātī tribe of the Anti-Atlas, whose warriors he commanded in battle against the ruling Almoravids (al-Murābiṭūn). Realising the need to unify the tribes of the Atlas, Ibn Tūmart trusted Abū Ḥaḥṣ’s loyalty and elevated his tribe to pre-eminence in the Almohad hierarchy, which consisted of tribes, scholars, and councils, which were