(December 15, 2014) A short documentary of queen Elizabeth’s visit to the colony of Aden (South Yemen) in the Sackler’s Qataban show states that it was a mix of Somali’s and Arabs in the 1950’s. My intuition is that during Roman times south Arabia was primarily what we call Somalia today.

Another video in the show of the King of Yemen in the 1950’s at the Sackler suggests a close relation to emperor Haile Sellassie of Ethiopia.

The south Arabians went on to a leadership role in Islam (overlords), and great wealth, while their Ethiopian cousins have languished in poverty. I say this as a dark intuition and not based on the current status of Yemen and Somalia.

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From “Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the coming of Islam.” By Robert G. Hoyland.

“... The Assyrians and Persians tell us almost nothing about south Arabia, but the Greeks and Romans, beneficiaries of a number of exploratory expeditions to that part of the world, are much more informative, though it still remained for them a strange and exotic land. Two of our earliest Greek sources on south Arabia, Theophrastus of Eresus (372-287 bc) and Eratosthenes of Cyrene (r.284-202 bc), describe it as dominated by four major peoples (ethne). In the words of the latter (cited by Strabo 16.4.2) these were 'the Minaeans, on the side towards the Red Sea, whose largest city is Qarnaw (Kama); next to these, the Sabaeans, whose metropolis is Marib (Mariaba); third, Qatabanians . . . whose royal seat is called Timna (Tamna); and farthest towards the east, the Hadramites, whose city is Shabwa (Sabata)' . These capital cities of theirs, along with those of a number of more minor peoples, were all located on the fringes of the desert known to medieval Arab geographers as the Sayhad (modern Ramlat al-Sab'atayn). A
site in the cooler, more verdant highlands might seem a more sensible choice, but it was via the perimeter of the desert that aromatics passed on their long journey to the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. Whoever wished to participate in this trade was therefore obliged to take up a position near to this route.

The only south Arabian people to speak about trade in their inscriptions are the Minaeans, who established themselves as a thriving economic power in their own right. Unlike the other three major kingdoms they advanced no political pretensions — their rulers fought no wars and minted no coins — but instead concentrated on commerce. Though their territory was small, they traded far and wide, sending out caravans to Egypt, Gaza, Syria, Mesopotamia and Tyre. Their name was practically synonymous with aromatics in the eyes of consumers (cf. Zenon papyri 59536: 'Minaean frankincense', dated 261 BC). And in addition:

through their territory the transit for the export of the frankincense is along one narrow track. It was these people who originated the trade and who chiefly practise it. . . . It is said that there are not more than 3000 families who retain the right of trading in it as a hereditary property. Consequently the members of these families are called sacred and are not allowed to be polluted by ever encountering women or funeral processions when they are engaged in making incisions in the trees in order to obtain the frankincense. In this way the price of the commodity is increased owing to scruples of religion.

(Pliny 12.54)

The Minaeans are also the only people to have composed a text that refers to an event external to south Arabia. Its authors are the merchants Ammisadaq and Sa'd, who thank their gods for bringing them home safely from an expedition to Egypt despite 'the hostilities which Saba and Khawlan had engaged upon against their persons' and despite 'the conflict which took place between the Medes (i.e. Persians)
and the Egyptians' (M 247). This latter incident could refer to the campaign of Artaxerxes in 343 BC or possibly to that of Cambyses in 525 BC, or else to some more minor skirmish that occurred between the two powers. In lists recording payment for foreign women to be admitted into Minaean society (M 392–98) there are thirty-two mentions of Gaza, a city that enjoyed great prosperity and fame during the Persian period (539–334 BC). One Minaean trader died in Egypt and inscribed on his sarcophagus that 'he imported myrrh and calamus for the temples of the gods of Egypt' (M 338). It is dated to the twenty-second year of Ptolemy son of Ptolemy, which allows us to place it somewhere between 262 and 59 BC. Finally a Greek-Minaean bilingual inscription from the island of Delos conveys the dedication of an altar to 'Wadd and the Minaean gods', most likely executed shortly after Delos' transformation into a free port in 166 BC (M 349). Though precision is as yet impossible, we can at least deduce from all these texts that the Minaeans flourished between about 500 and 100 BC.

Qataban is mentioned for the first time in the aforementioned inscription of Karib'il Watar (RES 3945), where it appears as an ally of Saba. Some time later inscriptions speak of conflict between Saba and Qataban. One, for example, is dated to 'the time of the war which was led by . . . the kings of Saba, Saba itself, and their allied tribes . . . against Yada"ab [king of Qataban], Qataban and the progeny of 'Amm [i.e. the Qatabanians]' (RES 3858). It is also noticeable that at some point the rulers of Qataban claim sovereignty over places formerly under Sabaean influence, and indeed Qatabanian inscriptions have been discovered in these places. The implication is that Qataban was now, like Saba before it, pursuing an expansionist policy. Eratosthenes of Cyrene states that their 'territory extends down to the straits and the passage across the Arabian Gulf (cited by Strabo 16.4.2), but says nothing about the Sabaean lands. Thus it would seem that by the third century BC Qataban was challenging Saba's dominant
position in south Arabia. And it is presumably to this period of expansion that one should attribute many of the magnificent tombs found on the slopes of Mount Hayd ibn 'Aqil outside the capital Timna, housing the exquisitely fashioned memorials of the great and good of the city (Pl. 6). Our knowledge of Hadramawt is even scantier due to a dearth of inscriptions, but its career would seem to be similar to that of Qataban. It is likewise named as an ally of Saba in the time of Karib'il Watar, and excavations at its capital give the impression that it was prospering about the fourth to second centuries BC when substantial fortifications and many secular and religious buildings were constructed.

The first century BC seems to be a turning point in the history of south Arabia, since the peoples located around the Sayhad desert, who had dominated the region's affairs up until this point, were now gradually overtaken by the tribes of the highlands. One factor in this transition was the establishment of a regular maritime link between the Mediterranean world, Arabia and India. Frequent attempts had been made to sail from Egypt to India with mixed success, but the first to do it repeatedly and with the aid of, rather than in spite of, the monsoon winds, was Eudoxus of Cyzicus, who accomplished three successful voyages between 117 and 109 BC. This traffic was greatly boosted when Augustus incorporated Egypt into the Roman empire, so that by the end of the first century BC Strabo could write:

Since the merchants of Alexandria are already sailing with fleets by way of the Nile and of the Arabian Gulf as far as India, these regions have become far better known to us of today than to our predecessors. At any rate when Gallus was prefect of Egypt, I accompanied him and ascended the Nile as far as Syene and the frontiers of Ethiopia. I learned that as many as one hundred and twenty vessels were sailing from Myos Hormos [a Red Sea port on the Egyptian coast] to India, whereas formerly, under the Ptolemies, only a very few ventured to undertake the voyage and to carry on
traffic in Indian merchandise.

This meant that the future in south Arabia lay in ports, not in caravan cities. Hadramawt realised this and established harbours at Qana (next to modern Bir Ali) and Samhar (modern Khor Rori in south Oman). A mid-first century AD author of a handbook on maritime trade gives us the following information about the former harbour:

After Eudaimon Arabia [modern Aden] ... is another port of trade on the coast, Qana, belonging to the kingdom of Eleazos, the frankincense-bearing land. . . . Above it inland lies the metropolis of Shabwa, which is also the residence of the king. All the frankincense grown in the land is brought into Qana as if to a warehouse, by camel as well as by rafts of a local type made of leather bags, and by boats. It also carries on trade with the ports across the water [i.e. in India] . . . and with its neighbour Persia. Its imports from Egypt are wheat, a limited quantity, wine . . . Arab clothing . . . copper, tin, coral, storax. . . . Also, for the king, [there is imported] embossed silverware and money, rather large quantities, plus horses and statuary and fine-quality clothing with no adornment. It exports local wares, namely frankincense and aloe; the rest of its exports are through its connections with the other ports of trade.

(Periplus 27-28)

A second possible factor in the decline of the old south Arabian caravan cities was Rome's attempted invasion. The result of the battle of Actium in 31 BC, with its defeat of Cleopatra, was that the emperor Augustus was in possession of Egypt and its Red Sea coast. It then occurred to him to extend Roman domination over the whole of the Red Sea, giving the empire control of all trade coming from India and Arabia. His personal motive was probably to better Alexander the Great, who had long fascinated him and who had once boasted to his tutor, in vain, that he would conquer the incense-producing lands. To this end Augustus
dispatched in 26 BC the commander Aelius Gallus:

to explore the tribes and the places, not only in Arabia, but also in Ethiopia, since Caesar saw that the Troglodyte country which adjoins Egypt neighbours upon Arabia, and also that the Arabian Gulf, which separates the Arabs from the Troglodytes, is extremely narrow. Accordingly he conceived the purpose of winning over the Arabs as a client nation or of conquering them outright. Another consideration was the report, which had prevailed from all time, that they were very wealthy, and that they sold aromatics and the most valuable stones for gold and silver, but never expended with outsiders any part of what they received in exchange. For he hoped either to enjoy the Arabs as his rich friends or to subjugate them as his rich enemies.

(Strabo 16.4.22)

However, the Nabataean administrator Syllaeus, who 'had promised to be his guide on the march and to supply all needs and to cooperate with him, acted treacherously in all things, and pointed out neither a safe voyage along the coast nor a safe journey by land, misguiding him through places that had no roads and by circuitous routes and through regions destitute of everything'. This and the sickness of many of his army meant that Gallus did not reach south Arabia until 24 BC. There he captured a number of cities and began the siege of Marsiaba, 'but for want of water desisted' and was obliged to retrace his steps. He nevertheless claimed a victory for Augustus, and on his return was able to report a number of discoveries, namely:

that the nomads live on milk and the flesh of wild animals; that the rest of the tribes extract wine out of palm trees, as the natives do in India, and get oil from sesame; that the Himyarites are the most numerous tribe; that the Minaeans have land that is fertile in palm groves and timber, and wealth in flocks; that the Cerbanians [Qatabanians?] and Agraeans, and especially the Hadramites,
excel as warriors; that the Careens have the most extensive and most fertile agricultural land; that the Sabaeans are the most wealthy, owing to the fertility of their forests in producing scents, their gold mines, their irrigated agricultural land and their production of honey and wax. . . . The Arabs wear turbans or else go with their hair unshorn; they shave their beards but wear a moustache; others, however, leave the beard also unshaven.

(Pliny 6.161-62)

The Himyarites, described above as 'the most numerous tribe', had their capital at Zafar in the fertile southern highlands, whence led a road to the port of Muza (modern Mocha) at the northern end of the straits of Bab al-Mandab, where Arabia almost touches Africa. Already by the mid-first century AD they had achieved a prominent position in the region, as is indicated by the aforementioned maritime manual:

On the very last bay on the lefthand shore of this [the Red] sea is Muza. . . . The whole place teems with Arabs — shipowners or charterers and sailors — and is astir with commercial activity. For they share in the trade across the water [the African coast] and with Barygaza [on the Indian coast], using their own outfits. . . . Nine days further inland is Zafar, the metropolis, residence of Karib'il, legitimate king of the two nations, the Himyarites and the one lying next to it, called the Sabaean. He is a friend of the emperors thanks to continuous embassies and gifts. The port of trade of Muza, though without a harbour, offers a good roadstead for mooring because of the anchorages with sandy bottom all around.

(Periplus 23-24)

The mention that Karib'il was king of two nations refers to the fact that Saba was obliged, through straitened circumstances, to seek a coalition with Himyar, forming the united monarchy of 'Saba and Dhu Raydan'. In the second
century AD, however, the fortunes of the Sabaean people revived somewhat and they began to campaign vigorously against the Himyarites. During this period of renaissance, which lasted about a century and a half, the temple of Almqah at Marib became once more an important religious centre and dedications were numerous, a new coinage was inaugurated, and the magnificent palace of Ghumdan was built at the highland town of San'a, which had been elevated to the status of capital city alongside Marib. But then at the end of the third century AD the Sabaean dynasty seems simply to die out and we hear no more of Saba as an independent power. The Minaeans had already lost their influence in the course of the first century BC. Himyar and Hadramawt appropriated and divided up Qataban's territories in the late second century AD. Finally, in the late third century, King Shammar Yuhar'ish of Himyar conquered Hadramawt, which subsequently ceased to be a major player on the political stage. The Himyarite era, an absolute system of dating, now became commonly used throughout south Arabia. And on an inscription dated 409 of the Himyarite era (AD 299) Shammar styled himself 'king of Saba and of Dhu Raydan and Hadramawt and Yamanat' (YMN 13), reflecting the fact that south Arabia had become a unified state for the first time.

The glorious days when the caravan cities of the Sayhad desert exercised a monopoly over the provisioning of aromatics had gone. And as these cities became poorer, they were less and less able to withstand the encroachments of Arab tribes to their north. From the first century BC onwards Arabs are mentioned with increasing frequency in inscriptions. Sometimes this will be in connection with raids against them. Thus the highland tribe of Hashid in northwest Yemen had once to make 'war against some of the Arabs on the borders of the tribe Hashid and in some of the lands of the Arabs, Arabs who had acted wrongfully toward their lords, the kings of Saba, and in some of the lands of the tribes of the king of Saba' (Ja 561 bis). At other times Arabs feature as auxiliaries in the armies of the settled kingdoms, as when the Sabaeans kings confronted a
coalition comprising 'Hadramawt and Qataban and Radman and Madhay and every person and the Arabs who were with them' (Ja 629). The settled states were obliged to develop a policy for dealing with these tribes: singling out certain chiefs for recognition as kings, taking hostages as guarantee of good behaviour, conducting punitive raids in cases of violation of agreements and so on. We see an example of Saba practising just such a policy in an inscription in which two Sabaean kings give thanks to the god Almqah:

because he enabled them successfully to exact from Malik, king of [the Arab tribe of] Kinda, the reparation which Malik was required to make to Almaqah and the kings of Saba, [namely the person of] Imru' al-Qays son of 'Awf, king of Khasasa, by holding that Malik and the leaders of Kinda in detention in Marib until they surrendered that young man Imru' al-Qays and gave as hostages from Kinda his [Malik's] child and the sons of the chiefs and leaders of Kinda, and made [further] reparation to Almaqah and the kings of Saba in horses, riding camels and transport camels.

And we also have evidence of diplomatic exchanges, such as the mission of a personal assistant of the early third-century AD Sabaean king Ilsharah Yahdib 'to the kings of the north, namely al-Harith ibn Ka'b, king of Asad, and Malik ibn Badd, king of Kinda and Madhhij and some other Arabs' (CIAS 2.33; cf ZI 75: mission of Ilsharah to 'kings of Ghassan, Nizar and Madhhij').

SOUTH ARABIA

THE BYZANTINE/SASANIAN PERIOD

(c. ad 240–630)

The kings of Himyar, now masters of all south Arabia, followed the example of Saba and Hadramawt in extending their influence over the Arab tribes, though ranging much
further to the north than their predecessors. An inscription dated to the year 470 (ad 360) enumerates the military campaigns of certain Himyarite kings, who advanced as far as Yabrin (an oasis in east Arabia), Jaww (modern Yamada in northeast Arabia) and Kharj (central Arabia), clashing with, among others, the tribes of Murad, Iyad, Ma'add and Abd al-Qays, the latter two defeated at Siyyan (northeast of Mecca) 'between the land of Nizar and the land of Ghassan' (Abadan 1). An inscription of the first half of the fifth century from central Arabia relates how the ruler Abikarib As'ad and his son Hassan Yuha'min 'went and sojourned in the land of Ma'add on the occasion of the establishment of certain of their tribes' (Ry 509). Muslim sources also describe an expedition of Abikarib As'ad to the north, during which 'he placed Hujr al-Kindi over the tribe of Ma'add' (Ibn Habib, Muh. 368; Isfahani 16.354). Evidently Himyar had appointed Hujr's clan, from the tribe of Kinda, to act as their deputies in central Arabia, maintaining order among the Arab tribes in that area. This would explain why Himyarite rulers subsequently adopted the additional title of 'kings . . . of their Arabs of the highlands and of the coast' and why Hujr felt justified in styling himself 'king of Kinda' in a south Arabian graffito. The respective sons of these leaders then continued this arrangement:

Among those who served the Himyarite king Hassan was 'Amr son of Hujr al-Kindi, the chief of Kinda during his time. When Hassan led an expedition against the Jadis [in Yamama], he appointed Amr as his deputy over certain affairs . . . . Amr son of Hujr was a man of sound judgement and sagacity.

(Tabari 1.880-81)

And apparently their own sons after them followed suit: 'He [the son of Hassan Yuha'min] dispatched Harith son of 'Amr
son of Hujr al-Kindi to Ma'add and set him over them' (Wahb ibn Munabbih 299). At this point the Byzantines began to woo the clan of Hujr, as is recounted by a certain Nonnosus, who belonged to a Byzantine diplomatic dynasty. He tells us that his grandfather had been sent to Harith son of 'Amr son of Hujr al-Kindi by the emperor Anastasius (491–518), and both his father Abraham and himself were sent to Qays, 'a descendant of Harith', in the time of Justinian (527–65).

Now Qays, to whom Nonnosus was sent, commanded two of the most notable Arab tribes, Kinda and Ma'add. Before Nonnosus' appointment his father, Abraham, had also been sent on Justinian's orders to this Qays and had made a peace treaty, under the terms of which he took Qays' son, called Mu'awiya (Mauias), as hostage and carried him off to Byzantium. Subsequently Nonnosus negotiated with two aims: to bring Qays, if possible, to the emperor, and to reach the king of the people of Axum [in Ethiopia], then Ella Asbeha, and in addition to reach the Himyarites.... When Abraham came on another legation to Qays, the latter went to Byzantium, dividing his own command between his brothers Amr and Yazid, while he personally received from the emperor command of Palestine.

(Photius 3)

During their time as Himyar's client kings, and briefly as Rome's, the chiefs of Kinda based themselves at Qaryat Dhat Kahl (modern Qaryat al-Faw), 280 km northeast of Najran. This settlement lay on the trade route connecting south Arabia with east Arabia and Iraq, and it had already been used by the Minaeans around the third to second centuries BC. Thereafter it became the capital of the Arab tribes of Qahtan and Madhlij, as is indicated by the gravestone of Mu'awiya ibn Rabi'a, 'king of Qahtan and Madhlij'. During their time and that of Kinda it became an impressive town, comprising a market, palace, temple, tombs and houses, and its notables were wealthy enough to commission fine frescoes and grand statues and to import high-quality
objects of glass, metal and ivory (PI. 8). At the height of their influence Kinda felt confident enough to mint their own coins, stamping them with the name of their patron god Kahl.

Around AD 300 the Himyarite king Shammar Yuhar'ish sent an envoy 'to Malik son of Ka'b, king of [the tribe of] al-Azd, and from there he [the envoy] undertook two further journeys, to Ctesiphon and Seleucia, the two royal cities of Persia, and he reached the land of [the tribe of] Tanukh [in southern Iraq]' (Sharaf 31). A few decades later there was an exchange of ambassadors and establishment of peaceful relations between Himyar and Ethiopia (Ir 28). And about the same time the Byzantine emperor Constantius (337–61) dispatched ambassadors, accompanied by the missionary Theophilus the Indian, to the ruler of the Himyarites, seeking permission to build churches for the use of visiting Byzantine merchants and 'of any others who might incline towards Christianity' (Philostorgius 3.4). Already by this time, then, south Arabia was becoming involved in superpower politics. This was to intensify dramatically in the early sixth century when full-scale war broke out between Ethiopia and Himyar. Christian writers portray these events in terms of religious oppression and martyrdom. There is no suggestion in indigenous sources, however, of persecution of Christians solely for their faith. The objection seems rather to be bound up with politics, for extension of Christianity was perceived as extension of Byzantine political influence, which was opposed by pro-Persian parties and champions of Yemen's independence. A hint of future trouble came in the 470s when a priest named Azqir was executed for active proselytisation in Najran. Then the Byzantine merchant Cosmas Indicopleustes informs us that while he was in the vicinity of Ethiopia, 'at the beginning of the reign of Justin [518–27], emperor of the Romans, Ella Asbeha, then king of the Axumites, was on the point of going to war against the Himyarites' (2.56).
The reason why they waged war between themselves was that . . . when the aforementioned Roman merchants crossed over from the lands of the Himyarites to enter those of the Indians to trade there as usual, the king of the Himyarites, Dimnos, learned about it, seized them, killed them and plundered all their merchandise, saying: 'this is because in the countries of the Romans the Christians wickedly harass the Jews who live in their countries and kill many of them. Therefore I am putting these men to death.' In this way he used to kill numerous merchants until many were seized by terror and refused to come to the country, and the trade with the kingdom of the Ethiopians ceased. . . . Because of this they came to great enmity and declared war on each other. . . . Then they fought a battle with each other and the king of the Ethiopians was victorious over the king of the Himyarites. He took him captive, killed him and plundered his kingdom.

(Pseudo-Dionysius 54-56; cf Malalas 18.15; Theophanes 223)

Ella Asbeha then installed over the south Arabians a Christian king.

However:

after some time the Himyarite Jews grew stronger. When the Christian king whom the king of the Ethiopians had established there died, they chose a king from among themselves over the people of the Himyarites [named Yusuf, Dhu Nuwas in Muslim sources]. And in bitter wrath they slew and destroyed all the Christian people there, men, women, young people and little children, poor and rich.

(Pseudo-Dionysius 56)

This is to some extent borne out by a number of other Syriac documents and also by three contemporary south
Arabian inscriptions:

He [king Yusuf] destroyed the church and massacred the Ethiopians in Zafar, and waged war on [the pro-Ethiopian tribes of] Ash'ar, Rakb, Farasan and Mukha'. And he undertook the war and siege of Najran and the fortification of the chain [across the harbour at the straits] of Mandab. So he mustered troops under his own command, and sent them [the chiefs loyal to him] with an independent detachment. And what the king successfully took in spoils in this campaign was 12,500 slain, 11,000 captives, and 290,000 camels, oxen and sheep. This inscription was written by the lord Sharah'il the Yazanid when he was taking precautionary measures against Najran with the Hamdanid tribesmen, both townsfolk and nomads {hgr w'rb}, and a striking force of Yazanites and nomads of Kinda, Murad and Madhhij, while his brother lords were with the king for defence on the sea from the Ethiopians and were fortifying the chain of Mandab. All that they have recorded in this inscription in the way of killings, booty and precautionary measures was on a campaign, the termination of which, when they turned homeward, was in thirteen months [from its start],

(Ja 1028, July 633/AD523) 3

Then he [Yusuf] sent [an envoy] to Najran in order that hostages might be exacted from them, otherwise he would wage war against them [in earnest]. But there was no surrender of hostages; on the contrary they [the Najranites] committed criminal aggression on them [the Himyarites].

(Ry 507, July 633/ad 523; cf Ry 508)

A moving account of these events from a Christian perspective (portrayed as a martyrdom of innocent believers) is given by a certain Harith (Arethas), who dates the calamity to November of the Seleucid year 835/ad 523 (though at the end a scribe wrote 830, forgetting the word 'five', unwittingly causing much debate among modern scholars about the date of these events). A
response from the Ethiopians to this aggression was not long in coming:

He [Ella Asbeha] collected a fleet of ships and an army and came against them, and he conquered them in battle and slew both the king and many of the Himyarites. He then set up in his stead a Christian king, a Himyarite by birth, by name Esimiphaeus, and after ordaining that he should pay tribute to the Ethiopians every year he returned to his home. In this Ethiopian army many slaves and all who were readily disposed to crime were quite unwilling to follow the king back, but were left behind and remained there because of their desire for the land of the Himyarites, for it is an extremely good land. These fellows at a time not long after this, in company with certain others, rose against the king Esimiphaeus and put him in confinement in one of the fortresses there, and established another king over the Himyarites, Abraha by name. Now this Abraha was a Christian, but a slave of a Roman citizen who was engaged in the business of shipping in the city of Adulis in Ethiopia.

(Procopius 1.20; cf. Pseudo-Dionysius 68)

That imperial politics and matters of trade lay behind these conflicts is clear from the subsequent Byzantine response:

At that time, when Ella Asbeha was reigning over the Ethiopians and Esimiphaeus over the Himyarites, the emperor Justinian sent an ambassador, Julianus, demanding that both nations on account of their community of religion should make common cause with the Romans in the war against the Persians. For he purposed that the Ethiopians, by purchasing silk from India and selling it among the Romans, might themselves gain much money, while causing the Romans to profit in only one way, namely, that they be no longer compelled to pay over their money to their enemy. ... As for the Himyarites it was desired that they should establish Qays, the fugitive, as chief over Ma'add, and
with a great army of their own people and of the Ma'add Saracens make an invasion into the land of the Persians. This Qays was by birth of chiefly rank and an exceptionally able warrior, but he had killed one of the relatives of Esimiphaeus and was a fugitive in a land utterly destitute of human habitation. So each king, promising to put this demand into effect, dismissed the ambassador, but neither one of them did the things agreed upon by them. For it was impossible for the Ethiopians to buy silk from the Indians, since the Persian merchants always locate themselves at the very harbours where the Indian ships first put in, as they inhabit the adjoining country and are accustomed to buy the whole cargoes. And it seemed to the Himyarites a difficult thing to cross a country which was a desert and which extended so far that a long time was required for the journey across it, and then to go against a people much more warlike than themselves.

(Procopius 1.20)

Another source, apparently using a first-hand report, is more positive:

When the Roman ambassador was brought in he knelt and made obeisance, and the Ethiopian king ordered me {sic} to arise and approach him. When he received the letter from the Roman emperor he kissed the seal, and when he received the gifts the emperor sent him he was amazed. Opening the letter and reading it, through an interpreter, he discovered that its contents were that he should arm himself against Kawad [488–531], the emperor of the Persians, and destroy the territory bordering on his own. And in future he was no longer to engage in commerce with him, but to carry on trade through the country of the Himyarites he had subjugated, then by way of the Nile to Alexandria in Egypt. Immediately Ella Asbeha, the king of the Ethiopians, in the sight of the Roman ambassador, declared war on the Persians. He sent out ahead the Himyarite Saracens he had under him and attacked Persian territory on behalf of the Romans.
The Abraha brought to power by insurrectionaries proved to be an able ruler and was the last great monarch of south Arabia. He successfully fought off attempts by Ella Asbeha to oust him, though he continued to send tribute to Ella Asbeha's successor. By 658 (548 ad), however, he felt able to assume the title of king and, according to a lengthy inscription at the Marib dam (CIS 4.541), he received embassies from no less than five neighbouring powers: the Ethiopians, the Byzantines, the Persians, Mundhir of Lakhm, Harith ibn Jabala of Ghassan and his kinsman Abikarib ibn Jabala. He also managed to quell a revolt by his appointee over Kinda, one Yazid ibn Kabasha, 'whom he had appointed as deputy (khlft) over Kinda at a time when it had no deputy' (CIS 4.541). And in 552 he launched two campaigns, one led by himself (often equated with the expedition of the elephant alluded to in Quran 105) and the other by his Arab allies, in order to assert his authority over central Arabia:

By the power of the Merciful One and His messiah, the king Abraha . . . wrote this inscription when he had raided Ma' add in the spring razzia in the month of April when all the Banu Amir had revolted. Now the king sent Abu Jabr with [the tribes of] Kinda and Ali and [he sent] Bishr son of Hisn with [the tribes of] Sa'd and Murad. Kinda and Ali were present in the vanguard of the army against the Banu 'Amir in the valley of Dhu Markh, and Murad and Sa'd in a valley on the Turaba route. And they slew and made captive the enemy and took satisfactory booty. The king, on the other hand, did battle at Haliban [west of modern Riyad] and the troops of Ma'add were defeated and forced to give hostages. After all this Amr son of Mundhir [of Lakhm] negotiated with Abraha and agreed to give hostages to Abraha, for Mundhir had invested him [Amr] with the governorship over Ma'add. So Abraha returned from Haliban by the power of the Merciful One ... in the year 662.
With an inscription of 669 (AD 559), the last dated south Arabian text known, a long era of history comes to an end. Thereafter, so Arabic sources tell us, the Ethiopian presence grew stronger and more tyrannical, prompting the heroic and semi-legendary Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan to seek outside help:

When the people of Yemen had long endured oppression, Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan the Himyarite went ... to Nu'man ibn Mundhir, who ... took him with him and introduced him to Khosro. ... When Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan entered his presence he fell to his knees and said: 'O king, ravens [meaning the Ethiopians] have taken possession of our country ... and I have come to you for help and that you may assume the kingship of my country.' ... So Khosro sent [to fight the Ethiopians] those who were confined in his prisons to the number of 800 men. He put in command of them a man called Wahriz who was of mature age and of excellent family and lineage. They set out in eight ships, two of which foundered, so that only six reached the shores of Aden. Sayf met Wahriz with all the people that he could muster, saying: 'My foot is with your foot, we die or conquer together.' 'Right!' said Wahriz. Masruq ibn Abraha, the king of Yemen, came out against him with his army. ... Wahriz bent his bow — the story goes that it was so tough that no one but he could bend it — and ordered that his eyebrows be fastened back. Then he shot Masruq and split the ruby in his forehead, and the arrow pierced his head and came out at the back of his neck. He fell off his mount and the Ethiopians gathered round him. When the Persians fell upon them, they fled and were killed as they bolted in all directions. Wahriz advanced to enter San'a, and when he reached its gate he said that his standard should never be lowered.

(Ibn Hisham 41-43; cf. Ibn Qutayba 1.149, from 'the
books of the Persians')

Sayf was made king on the understanding that he would remit taxes to Khosro every year and Wahriz returned to Persia. However, Sayf was stabbed to death by a group of Ethiopian servants and Khosro dispatched Wahriz once more, this time to bring Yemen under direct Persian rule. And so it remained until the early Muslim state took charge. ... “

Robert G. Hoyland, “Arabia and the Arabs: from the Bronze Age to the coming of Islam.”