

Two Christians of Pre-Islamic Mecca  
'Uthman ibn al-Huwairith and Waraqah ibn Naufal

by  
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The Christians in transit such as traders, caravan leaders and "tourists", including missionary monks, must have visited Mecca frequently in the period from the birth of Jesus Christ to the advent of Islam. Similarly "foreign" Christian residents of this city, such as slaves (both men and women) among others, are also met with there during the same period. The indigenous Meccans, renouncing their paganism and embracing Christianity, do not seem to exist, at least just before the dawn of Islam; they are certainly very rare. In so far as I know, the two of the earliest personalities of this kind are the *baṭriq* (patrice) 'Uthmān ibn al-Huwairith, and the *quss* (priest) Waraqah ibn Naufal, both members of the tribes of Quraysh, of the branch Asad. Both of them are well-known to the historians, yet the origin of their conversion to Christianity is preserved, in so far as I could ascertain, in a still unpublished MS., viz. *Kitāb al-Munammāq* (Lucknow, India, pp 118—123) by the famous historian Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb (d. 245 H/869). The library of the late *mujtahid* Nāṣir Ḥusayn, where it is found, is not easily accessible to research scholars. It is proposed therefore to reproduce here this account in its entirety :

*The story of 'Uthmān ibn al-Huwairith and the Byzantine Emperor, reported on the authority of Hishām al-Kalbī, of Abu Amr ash-Shaybānī and of others.*

It so happened that 'Uthmān ibn al-Huwairith ibn 'Abd al-'Uzzā once went to Ibn Jafnah—i. e. 'Amr ibn Abī Shamir, brother of al-Hārith ibn Abī Shamir—sovereign (*malik*) of Syria, and proposed to him : "If you desire that the Qurayshites should be submissive to you?" He said : "Yes". Thereupon 'Uthmān demanded : "Write a letter patent in my favour, and nominate me as their king." The sovereign did that, and moreover imposed a tribute on each Mecca clan, to be paid to 'Uthmān.

Then 'Uthmān returned to Mecca with this letter of nomination, the Qurayshites found it inadmissible, and they sent a delegation to the sovereign. Meeting him, they said : "'Uthmān is an idiot; and an intelligent person like you can not behave us in this way. In fact,