

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## I. THE RED SEA: WHY SO CALLED.

DEAR PROFESSOR RHYS DAVIDS,—Numerous attempts have from time to time been made to account for the denomination “Red” as applied to this sea, but all the theories appear to me to be unsatisfactory. The one which I am about to mention occurred to me some years ago, when I happened to be reading Playfair’s “History of Yemen” while sailing up the Red Sea; but I have not hitherto brought the theory to notice, nor has anyone else, as far as I am aware.

Some authorities say that the sea derives its name from the colour of the coral with which it abounds; but as there is no *red* coral found in the Red Sea, this theory cannot be correct.

Others derive it—with more probability—from Edom or Idumaea (signifying ‘red’), the country occupied by the descendants of Esau, to the west of the Elanitic Gulf, now called the Gulf of Akaba. It seems, however, unlikely that so comparatively small a nation, with a very limited coastline, would give a name to so extensive a sea.

Quintus Curtius (lib. viii, cap. 9) says:—“It derived its name from King Erythros (signifying ‘red’); on which account the ignorant believe the water to be red.”

The Greeks called it the Erythrean Sea, but the term had a much wider signification than our Red Sea, as it included also the Gulf of Aden, the Persian Gulf, and a considerable portion of the Indian Ocean.

There being no striking redness visible either in the sea itself or its shores, we must seek among the names of bordering nations of antiquity for a derivation of the name which it has borne for so many centuries in even widely

different languages. With this idea before us, the Himyaritic (or Hamyaritic) nation, subsequently called Sabean, is the first that suggests itself. It derived its name from Hamyar, the son of Sāba, the founder of the dynasty, who was so called from the habit he had of wearing red garments, and was the first who wore a golden diadem in token of regal power. Very probably the "King Erythros" mentioned above is merely the Greek translation of Hamyar, whose name is derived from the Arabic *aḥmar*, 'red.' From him descended the whole of that race of princes who reigned in Yaman to the time of Islām. Their capital was Sāba, the modern Mārib; and Balkis, the celebrated queen of Sheba, is said to have been a sovereign of this dynasty.

The country of the Himyarites or Sabeans pretty nearly corresponded to the modern Yaman. For a long period they monopolized the commerce of India, and acted as the intermediate agents between the merchants of that country and those of Egypt; it is not, therefore, surprising that the sea washing their coastline should be called after them.

While on the subject of the Red Sea, it will perhaps not be out of place to mention a suggestion which may be of use to those interested in identifying the locality of the Ophir of Scripture. The idea occurred to me when reading Mr. J. Kennedy's paper on "The Early Commerce of Babylon with India" in the April number of this Journal.

The usual native name of the Dankali country, lying between Abyssinia and Šomāli-land, is 'AFAR. The similarity of this name with Ophir is very striking; but whether the country fulfils the requisite conditions as to gold and other products, I am unable to say. Professor Reinisch, of Vienna, some ten or twelve years ago published a grammar and vocabulary of the Dankali language under the title "Die Afar Sprache," and presented me with a copy.

—Yours faithfully,

J. S. KING (Major).

*Southsea, April 23, 1898.*