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DISSERTATION

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Seeing Eye to Eye: Islamic Universalism
in the Roman and Byzantine Worlds,
7th to 10th Centuries

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Olof Heilo

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Contents

Introduction	7
1. Empires	14
1.1 Farewell to Syria	20
1.1.1 At Crossroads	21
1.1.2 The Prophet	28
1.1.3 Raiders and Conquerors	32
1.1.4 The Arab Caesar	40
<i>1.1.5 Summary</i>	46
1.2 Submission	48
1.2.1 A Roman Ka'ba?	49
1.2.2 Emperors Without Crosses	57
1.2.3 Guardians of Paradise	64
1.2.4 Mirror for Princes	72
<i>1.2.5 Summary</i>	73
1.3 Holy War?	78
1.3.1 The Great Creature	79
1.3.2 Apocalypse Now	83
1.3.3 The "First Fall of Constantinople"	92
1.3.4 A Question of Faith	100
<i>1.3.5 Summary</i>	108
2. Borderlands	110

2.1 Saints, Warriors, Saviours	114
2.1.1 Unseen Warfare	115
2.1.2 The Soul and the Flesh	119
2.2 The Visible and the Invisible	126
2.2.1 Spiritual Matters	127
2.2.2 Problems of Confidence	134
2.3 Preliminary Observations (When does History become History?)	139
2.3.1 <i>The Return of the Kings</i>	139
2.3.2 <i>The Persistence of Memory</i>	141
3. Commonwealths	147
3.1 Cultural Capitals	151
3.0.1 <i>Remarks</i>	156
3.2 Renewal?	157
3.2.1 Books from Baghdad?	159
3.2.2 Class and Classics	168
3.2.3 Distinctions	174
3.2.4 <i>Remarks</i>	177
3.3 Missions	179
3.3.1 Word Wars	180
3.3.2 Language Games	182
3.3.3 <i>Remarks</i>	184
Conclusions	186
Bibliography	192

Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing:
for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. Break
forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath
comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

KING JAMES BIBLE, *Isaiah* 52:8

HEROD

What does it mean? The Redeemer of the world?

TIGELLIN

It is a title claimed by Caesar.

HEROD

But Caesar is not coming to Judaea. Only yesterday I received letters from
Rome. He told me nothing about that.

OSCAR WILDE, *Salomé* (1892)

Introduction

O King, you had a dream in which you saw an image, a huge idol that was facing you and whose countenance was terrifying. Its head was made of pure gold, its hands, breast and arms were made of silver, its belly and thighs were of bronze, the legs of iron and the feet of iron mixed with clay. As you beheld it, a rock, untouched by hands, broke away from a mountain and smote the image upon the feet of iron and clay, and shattered them to pieces. And instantly the clay, the iron, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all shattered, and they became like the chaff of a treshing-place in summertime; a strong wind carried them away and they were nowhere to be found. But the rock that had smitten the idol became a huge mountain which filled the whole world.¹

When the Jewish prophet Daniel faces the victorious Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II, the representative of a politically inferior people claims to possess a stronger and more everlasting God than those of his overlords. It is a story which became so often repeated and reinterpreted that it turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy, whose universal appeal became its own foretelling about a truth more everlasting than that of its dreamer. What is important to note in the first place, however, is that it is not Jewish Monotheism which makes the truth claims of Daniel universal, but the universe – the dream of Nebuchadnezzar – in which the Jewish prophet claims the preferential right to interpret the truth. A universal God requires a universe; it is no coincidence that Daniel ended his days in the service of the first “World empire”, Persia, having served the restorer of Jerusalem, Cyrus the Great.²

¹Σύ, βασιλεῦ, ἐώρακας, καὶ ἰδοὺ εἰκὼν μία, καὶ ἦν ἡ εἰκὼν ἐκείνη μεγάλη σφόδρα, καὶ ἡ πρόσωπις αὐτῆς ὑπερφερῆς ἐστήκει ἐναντίον σου, καὶ ἡ πρόσωπις τῆς εἰκόνης φοβερὰ· καὶ ἦν ἡ κεφαλὴ αὐτῆς ἀπὸ χρυσοῦ χρηστοῦ, τὸ στήθος καὶ οἱ βραχίονες ἀργυροὶ, ἡ κοιλία καὶ οἱ μηροὶ χαλκοὶ, τὰ δὲ σκέλη σιδηρᾶ, οἱ πόδες μέρος μὲν τι σιδήρου, μέρος δὲ τι ὄστράκινον. ἐώρακας ἕως ὅτου ἐτμήθη λίθος ἐξ ὄρους ἄνευ χειρῶν καὶ ἐπάταξε τὴν εἰκόνα ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας τοὺς σιδηροῦς καὶ ὄστρακίνοὺς καὶ κατήλεσεν αὐτά. τότε λεπτὰ ἐγένετο ἅμα ὁ σίδηρος καὶ τὸ ὄστρακον καὶ ὁ χαλκὸς καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος καὶ τὸ χρυσίον καὶ ἐγένετο ὡσεὶ λεπτότερον χύρου ἐν ἄλωνι, καὶ ἐρρίπισεν αὐτὰ ὁ ἄνεμος ὥστε μηδὲν καταλειφθῆναι ἐξ αὐτῶν· καὶ ὁ λίθος ὁ πατάξας τὴν εἰκόνα ἐγένετο ὄρος μέγα καὶ ἐπάταξε πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν. *Dan.* 2:31-35.

² Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth* 18ff. Cyrus is called “the anointed of the Lord” by Deuterioisaiiah (*Is.* 40ff) and it hardly needs to be emphasised which positive role Persia plays in the books of Daniel, Ezra, Esther and

Alexander the Great destroyed the political entity created by the Persians, but he had perhaps not needed go the whole way to India to understand the historical futility of his universal dreams. If he had listened to his teacher Aristotle, he would have known that the virtues of truth – craft (*techne*), knowledge (*episteme*), judgement (*phronesis*), wisdom (*sophia*) and intellect (*nous*) – are subject to rules which the mortal man can claim to subdue as little as he might hope to conquer the celestial bodies.³ As it were, after Alexander’s death the dispersed Hellenistic *oikoumene* was soon swallowed up by an empire that proved to have a more durable political *techne*, that of the Romans.

We are never told what Jesus said when Pilate asked him what truth is, which is another way of answering the question. A Socrates would have initiated a dialogue with his accuser, but Jesus is no Greek philosopher and cannot meet Pilate as opponent in a common field of play.⁴ The truth of the Roman official is related to the rules of the physical world governed by the emperor; the truth of Jesus belongs to a kingdom that is “not of this world”. Technically, Pilate does condemn him to death, yet he “cannot find any fault” with him in his own view of sight, and Jesus does not consider the Roman guilty of deicide, since the death sentence is only a worldly matter. The real offenders, it is implied, are the Jews who have spiritually refused to recognise Jesus as their Messiah.⁵

So far Jesus. The King of the Jews, of course, should not be confused with the Graeco-Roman Christ, who had a much more thorny path towards reconciliation with the world of Pilate.⁶ The identification of Orthodox Christianity with the Roman empire after Constantine was the result of a historical process whose paradigmatic implications should not be exaggerated.⁷ Garth Fowden has made another important contribution to the subject by shifting focus from the theological and ideological inter-religious struggles of Monotheist

Nehemyah, mirroring its acceptance of the Jews and their God. Cf. pharaonic Egypt, where the Jews had been threatened by extinction, with the logical consequence that their God treated Pharaoh in corresponding manner.

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b15.

⁴ The Gospels often refer to *sophia* but never to *techne* or even *episteme*. The relationship between Christianity and Platonism should not be thematised here.

⁵ *John* 18:28-19:22. With reference to the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, this would be the point where the preferential right of interpretation is claimed by a new prophet (if Jesus is regarded as a prophet with reference to himself); Christian tradition identifies the “rock untouched by hands” as a metaphor of Christ.

⁶ At least as early as in the reign of Claudius (41-54), when Suetonius says that those Jews were expelled from Rome who caused trouble and dissent on behalf of “Chrestus” (*Vit. Claud.* XXV).

⁷ And as even the angry Celcus noted, there never existed one “Christianity”, as less as there existed one “Paganism” before Christianity – though Julian the Apostate actually tried to formulate one.

beliefs, to the more complex struggles of universalist empires with universalist faiths.⁸ As a simple rule of play, the Roman procurator might personally sympathise with Jesus, but only openly act on his behalf as long as it does not interfere with his own ability to do so. If becoming Christian had meant taking the Cross and forsaking the world (as the preachings of Jesus actually urges) the Byzantine empire would have ceased to exist before it was born.

Some three hundred years later, again, the emperor Heraclius is said to have been presented with a religious truth sent from God to the world through the Arab prophet Muhammad. Like Pilate facing Jesus, Heraclius allegedly sympathised with Muhammad, but felt constrained to act on his behalf out of fear for the consequences.⁹ The morale of the story is identical: even if Heraclius had adhered to the spiritual doctrines of Islam, he would not have been able to change the social, cultural and political reality he was a part of.¹⁰ Instead, the ensuing military victories of the Arabs are understood to have brought about the breaking-up of his empire, that, like a stroke of Alexander, opened the doors for the world of Islam. As many traditional Muslim views of the ‘Umayyad empire reveal, it was not really that easy.¹¹ Late Antiquity universalist expressions prove to live forth well into the eighth century, before the religious commonwealths known as the Christian and the Islamic worlds more definitely take the positions of the “World’s Two Eyes”.¹²

The historical evidence for this process, which has been discussed for decades,¹³ should not be taken as an argument to disregard the meaning of religious narratives and literary *topoi* used to distinguish different partners in the historical play. Returning to the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, it must be admitted that the notion about an eternal truth overriding the timely existence of men, communities and whole empires plays a role in the human perception of history as a meaningful structure. But its *universal* meaning cannot be overridden; it must be measured after the universes of men, communities or empires where it claims to interpret the truth. That is the starting-point of this work.

⁸ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth* 80ff, 108.

⁹ Tabari *Tārīḥ* I:1561-6.

¹⁰ His futile efforts to change the Orthodox doctrines are surveyed in chapter 1.1.

¹¹ Since the ‘Umayyads are mostly remembered as bad and corrupt Muslims; cf. 1.2.

¹² Fowden’s formula (Cf. *Empire to Commonwealth* 12-36, 138-68).

¹³ Cf. also Fowden, *Qusayr ‘Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*; *ibid.*, and Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the ‘Umayyads*; Bowersock, Brown, Grabar (eds.) *Understanding Late Antiquity*, and of course innumerable contributions to the *SLAEI*, *TRW* and *FCIW* series.

Islam in Byzantium?

This is a Byzantine study, because it concerns not the truth of Islam, but the reality of Byzantium, and it is our presumption that the impact of the former upon the latter must be measured from the size of the crater rather than that of the projectile. Either the rock has dispersed and exists no longer, or it has become a mountain that fills the world; both interpretations are possible when it comes to Islam, because Byzantium is a very elusive concept. If it is taken in the strict political sense, as a cultural and political spur of the Ancient Roman empire, the political struggle with the Islamic world will achieve enormous, not to say dualistic, proportions.¹⁴ If it is defined within a cultural and religious context, as a Medieval Christian commonwealth, the world of Islam might be completely left out of the picture.¹⁵ Between those definitions lies a sociocultural no-mans-land of anti-imperialism, local identity and heresy, whose nature is difficult to define.¹⁶

¹⁴ Mommsen focused upon the Hellenistic culture when he talked about the Arabic peninsula “aus welcher seiner Zeit der Henker des Hellenentums, der Islam, hervorgehen sollte” (*Das römische Imperium der Cäsaren* XII). Pirenne was more concerned with the economical and sociocultural break he saw as a consequence of Islam: “La grande question qui se pose ici est de savoir pourquoi les Arabes, qui n’étaient certainement pas plus nombreux que les Germains, n’ont pas été absorbés comme eux par les populations de ces régions de civilisation supérieure dont ils se sont emparés? ...” (*Mahomet et Charlemagne* 130f.) Patricia Crone answers: “... the Arabs had conquered the Middle East in the name of a jealous God, a God that dwelt among the tribes and spoke in their language, and morally they did remain in Mecca ...” (*Slaves on Horses* 22). Byzantium as connected to the Late Antiquity *oikoumene* will here appear one of the greatest losers to the emerging Islamic world.

¹⁵ Summed up by Meyendorff, “Byzantine Views of Islam” 132f: “as we look at the over-all picture between the two religious worlds, we see that essentially they remained impenetrable by each other. Among all the historical consequences of the Arab conquest of the Middle East, one seems to me to be the *most important*: for ages Byzantine Christianity was kept on the defensive. Islam not only obliged the Christians to live in a tiny enclosed world which concentrated on the liturgical cult, it also made them feel that such an existence was a normal one. The old Byzantine instinct for conservatism, which is both the main force and the principal weakness of Eastern Christianity, became the last refuge which could ensure its survival in the face of Islam.” From this perspective, the Byzantine world is repressed rather than replaced by that of Islam, but the two concepts still remain culturally and spiritually alien to each other.

¹⁶ Cameron, “New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature” 88: “... the term ‘Byzantine’ is a very blunt instrument. It will serve well enough as a blanket description of the situation and the literature up to the time of the conquests – if a work was written in a Byzantine province, we might as well call it Byzantine, even if it was written in Syriac, though even that begs the question of local loyalty and culture. But what about later writers? Is John of Damascus, for instance, ‘Byzantine’? ... In general, it is even more difficult to define the texts and

The problem is not a merely semantic one, for it affects our approach to the largely sourceless “Dark Centuries”. If Patricia Crone once saw early Islamic history as a later construction,¹⁷ what can we say of the Byzantine historiographical tradition, that is recovering even slower, making its first known reappearance with Theophanes in the ninth century? The contradictions in Islamic retrospectives might seem almost trifling compared to the confusion marring the origins of the Isaurian emperors, the nature of Iconoclasm or the fate of Classical learning in Constantinople in the eighth century.¹⁸ Both the ‘Umayyad and Isaurian dynasties left considerable non-literary traces in history: the former because they built the first monuments of Islam and the latter because they allegedly destroyed Christian figurative arts in Byzantium. But which is the context for understanding their actions when we only know them from their counter-contexts?¹⁹ If inconsistency is all we are left with, should we say that the Byzantine world was, for the time being, as non-existent as its Sassanian equal had become, or as early Islam was according to the previous theories of Crone and Cook?²⁰

As it may be inferred, we are looking for a coherent Byzantine undertext which is impossible to find. Our categorisations are already of a subjective nature; they represent different Byzantine worlds – or interpretations of the world – not *the* world. But these are the

authors of the immediate post-conquest period. These problems of terminology can and do stand in the way of historical understanding, especially in an interdisciplinary context such as this ...” – Someone who has vehemently rejected this kind of reasoning is Speros Vryonis: “By culture I do not understand the narrow sense of the word usually employed by Byzantinists and classicists and as described by the late Romily Jenkins as essentially an aristocratic or elitist phenomenon, or as he says, a meal eaten at the table of the high and the mighty and in which the commonality share only to the extent that a few crumbs fall from the table of the mighty to the commonality who wait around it. I understand the term in the anthropological sense as all-encompassing of every facet of organized human society and life, from literature to artisinal technology, from organized systems of thought to systems for perpetuating such systems of technology and thought within a society. From this point of view agricultural technology is as important as literary paideia” (“The Decline of Medieval Hellenism” 227). In this way Vryonis seems to deny any issue of class or other sociocultural distinctions. (Cf. also his article “Recent Scholarship on Continuity and Discontinuity of Culture”.)

¹⁷ Crone, *Slaves on Horses* 3-17, Crone, Hinds, *God’s Caliph* 23.

¹⁸ Whitby, “Greek Historical Writing” 66-80; Rosenqvist, *Bysantinsk Litteratur* 53-9, Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* 7ff, Treadgold, *A Concise History of Byzantium* 116-123.

¹⁹ Cf. Hoyland on Crone, Cook and van Ess in *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 592ff and Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early Abbasids* 12-32 for a concise discussion on the problems of this source material.

²⁰ As the recent works of Ohlig and Luxenberg indirectly show (*Die dunklen Anfänge* 2006, *Der Frühe Islam* 2007), there is an urgent need to approach this problem from a Byzantine point of view, if only to prove the futility of too much historical speculation and the tendency to impose our own history upon the past.

conditions under which the Medievalist must and should work. There might have been as many Byzantiums as there were Byzantines and we do not enjoy the prophetic gift of telepathically knowing what social or individual meaning the empire and its religion had to them.²¹ Rejecting individual variation would lead to the absurd notion that what we define as Byzantines were people who all perceived and conceived their reality in the same way; rejecting large-scale conceptualisations as literary constructions might end up in the logical solipsism that Byzantium has never existed except in the mind of the scholar writing about it.²² In order not to be accused of what Eric Hobsbawm has called “postmodernism in the forest”,²³ we should try to treat each of these possible Byzantiums on its own premises and discuss under what conditions it *could* have existed; and hence, what impact Islam *could* have had upon it. For we might assume that our concepts hints at an unconscious reality which the observers have tried to define.²⁴ If there are “two eyes of the world” struggling to do this on a large-scale level, we might even suggest that their world of sight is partly one and the same, though they do not clearly recognise it in the darkness.

The obvious way of testing this hypothesis is by a comparative re-reading of the most widespread Greek and Arabic sources on the early struggles between Islam and the Byzantine world, from the coming of Islam in the early seventh century to its final establishment in the early tenth, with reference to themselves, to each other, and to the universes where they claim validity. But it is important to remember that it is only through the integration of a counter-contextuality that such a study will have achieved something.²⁵ The single eye does not perceive more than two dimensions; two contrary positions of definitions will never “see eye to eye” in an argument; and a third eye will not understand more about a game of chess just by studying the optical difference between the black and the white. To the

²¹ Aron Gurevich offers an interesting discussion to this problem in *The Origins of European Individualism*, though it is somewhat unclear what psychological implications he sees in an individual identifying with a literary type (237ff). Even the modern scholar makes of himself a *persona* in his writings.

²² At any rate, a Byzantine would not have regarded himself as a Byzantine, since that is a conceptualisation by the Western philosophers of enlightenment who wanted to distance themselves from what they regarded as a “bastard” offspring from the Ancient world. (More on this by Cameron in *The Use and Abuse of Byzantium*.)

²³ Hobsbawm, *On History* XV.

²⁴ One could here think of the Indian legend about the five blind men and the elephant, famously quoted in the *Masnavi* of Jalal ad-Din Rumi. They might not possess any absolute knowledge on what they feel, but that is no reason to assume that the elephant “does not exist” as an entity for someone with a different perception.

²⁵ Ankersmit, *History and Tropology* I:5.3.1.

actors of a game (whose intentions might not be clear even to themselves) the colours are a matter of identification, but the game itself is a matter of movement and reciprocity within the changing limits of the play. The “third man” has nothing to accomplish there as long as he is not part of *their* game. To understand something about *them*, he should consider under what conditions they are playing against each other.²⁶ If they pay heed to common rules, he might tentatively assume that it says something about their mutual relationship as well as about their personal intentions beyond the boundaries of the gameboard.

It could be objected that the subject of the thesis presented here is, to a great deal, philosophical rather than historical. On the other hand, if there is something which has convinced me during the progress of work that both contrahents, irreconcilable as they might seem, have at least one field of play in common, it is the realisation that, wherever I found myself in doubt about the rules, I ended up in three millennias of Persian, Jewish, Greek, Arab and Latin thinkers from Zarathustra and Aristotle, Rashi and Avicenna to Ibn Khaldun and Mulla Sadra and even to Wittgenstein, whose epistemology aims beyond the emotives of historical narratives. Now, I can hardly claim to do it better, lest boast of any expertise in their game; and the philosophical question whether Islam was ever universal in any Byzantine sense must be left open for a final discussion. Here I will merely try to keep track of the two historical concepts between the physical limits of the *longue durées* and the epistemological boundaries of the observing subjects.²⁷

²⁶ An often-quoted anecdote used to illustrate the methods of Talmud describes two men falling down a chimney, one coming out dirty, the other one clean. The question “who will wash?” could be tackled in two different ways: either the dirty one will wash after looking on himself, or the clean one will wash after looking on the dirty. But the real answer should be to put the whole situation in question: how is it possible for two men to fall down a chimney, one coming out dirty and the other one clean?

²⁷ Each main part (1, 2, 3) is thought to represent the framework of a historical *epoché*, whose chapters (1.1, 1.2, 1.3) forms the epistemological context of the issues dealt with in the subchapters (1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3).

1. Empires

Introduction

To the Roman empire in the form it still had possessed under Justinian I (d. 565), the Mediterranean was everything: its origin, its purpose, its political, economical, cultural and ideological core.²⁸ The loss of the *limes* and once important provinces such as Gaul, Britain and Spain to the German invaders, as well as the recurring threats from Slavonic and Turkish peoples in the Balkans, could not alter the fact that the coasts remained Roman, the urban centres of the empire directed towards the sea and its different cultures knotted together by well-functioning oversea communications.²⁹ The sea in itself was of course not the actual source for interior prosperity, but it brought a very diverse multitude of interiors together which contributed to the dynamic character of the unifying empire.³⁰

The Imperial idea might be seen as the natural solution to a problem raised by the increasing complexity of this multicultural *lebensraum*.³¹ Christianity as a universalist religion was as much a consequence of it as a source for its upkeep. St. Paul spread the gospels not only with the help of Roman roads and waterways, but even protected by his Roman citizenship.³² The mercantile city centres around the coast, where Hellenized Jews and Christianized Pagans intermingled and from which the first anachoretic and monks emerged,³³ were strongly connected not only through bonds of culture, language and religion but by common political and economic interests.³⁴ Under the increasing threat from the invaders, it was a natural consequence that they would rely on the centralising power of the emperor rather than turn against it.³⁵

²⁸ McCormick, *Origins of European Economy* 83ff.

²⁹ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival* 1-3.

³⁰ Whitton, *The making of Orthodox Byzantium* 15-37.

³¹ Lewis, "Periods in the History of the Roman Empire" 3.

³² Horden/Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* 135.

³³ Rapp, "Desert, City and Countryside in the Early Christian Imagination" (reference brought to me by Johannes Grossmann) 99, 110.

³⁴ Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* 20ff.

³⁵ Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth* 37-60.

In the late fifth century, Victor of Vita described the Vandals, the German Arians who had sacked Rome, in the following manner:

Can there be found any name more convenient to describe this, than calling it barbarian? Do we have a better word for such violence, cruelty and horror? Even if you present them with gifts and appear with servility, the only thing they understand is to envy the Romans. And as for their desire to be like Romans, they are the first to debase the glory and standing of the Roman name. They do not desire one single Roman to be alive, and when they are said to spare the lives of those submitting to them, they only spare them to use them as their slaves: for they have never felt affinity for one single Roman. If the barbarian terror wanted to dispute with us, and if it was possible to dispute the Arian heresy in a reasonable way – but what reason is there in someone who is separating God the father from God the son and Saviour? – why did they come up with such evil and slander, and why did they want to destroy everything in a rage of spiritual fury?³⁶

The Roman Christianity defended by Victor was, perhaps more than a political phenomenon, a child of the Mediterranean in the same sense as Fernand Braudel would call Arab Islam a child of the hot deserts in the south. It required only a slight transformation of the cult of the Emperor-God, the living reminder of the power over the sea which brought so many different peoples together, to transform him into the Emperor-Saint, protector of the Orthodox Christians³⁷ which hearkened to the patriarchs in Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch

³⁶ Numquid alio proprio nomine uocitari poterant nisi ut barbari dicerentur, ferocitatis utique, crudelitatis et terroris uocabulum possidentes? Quos quantiscumque muneribus foueris, quantiscumque delinieris obsequiis illi aliud nesciunt nisi inuidere Romanis. Et quantum ad eorum adinet uoluntatem, semper cupiunt splendorem et genus Romani nominis nebulare. Nec ullum Romanorum omnino desiderant uiuere et ubi adhuc noscuntur *parcere subiectis*, ad utendum seruitiis illorum parcunt; nam nullum dilexerunt aliquando Romanim. Si disputare nitebatur de fide nobiscum barbara ferocitas et heresis Arriana rationabiliter disputaret – sed quando tenuit rationem quae a patre deo deum filium separat saluatorem? – quare dolis et calumniis egerunt, et uelut spiritu tempestatis procella sui furoris totum subuertere uoluerunt? Victor Vitensis, *Historia Persecutionis Africae Provinciae* III:62. I am grateful to Hans Lejdegård, Uppsala University, for having pointed out this passage to me and to Eva Nylander and Per Stobaeus, Lund university, for assisting me with the translation.

³⁷ The term, of course, is ambiguous, as it plainly refers to the “Christianity” which, for the time being, was defined as “orthodox”. As far as one does not acknowledge an intercession of the Holy Spirit (cf. conclusions) it is impossible to speak about a historical “Intention” with reference to ideology.

or Jerusalem.³⁸ The faithful were no longer persecuted for their refusal to worship the emperor, but well for rejecting Orthodox consensus.³⁹ Characteristically, the persecuted sects spread in – or fled to – areas which had severed themselves, or tried to sever themselves, from the Mediterranean: Arianism among the German invaders, Montanism in the interiors of Cappadocia, Monophysitism in Egypt and south of the Tauros, Nestorianism in whole Asia all the way to China.⁴⁰ Sassanid Iran, the closest rival civilization, based on the strategic plateau between the hot deserts of Arabia and the cold deserts of Central Asia,⁴¹ became a melting-pot for different anti-Roman elements.⁴² But many foreign peoples also felt attracted to Roman power due to its cultural superiority and social prestige.⁴³

Justinian I left long-lasting marks in history: political, juridical, religious and artistic. But under the surface of the triumphant picture presented by Procopius in *The Persian Wars*, *The Vandal Wars* and *The Gothic Wars*, a different world, the world of the *Anecdota*, so to say appears posthumously: a world devastated by depopulation of important regions due to plague, earthquakes and climate changes, disappearing routes of trade and the inability to keep the barbarians out.⁴⁴ The spread of Monophysitism and Nestorianism in the Semitic Near East and the increasing anti-Judaism within urban society⁴⁵ point at severe problems even in the so far stable Levante.⁴⁶ Towards the end of the 6th century, most Mediterranean cities

³⁸ Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of the Empire* 61f. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre* 154ff, 159ff. Dölger, *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt* 9-33.

³⁹ Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* 205ff.

⁴⁰ Herrin, *Formation of Christendom*, 62ff, Treadgold, *A Concise History of Byzantium* 79ff.

⁴¹ Howard-Johnston, “The Two Great Powers” 196.

⁴² Winter/Dignas, *Rom und Perserreich* 55f, 237, 257. The story about the last Athenian professors seeking employment at the court of shah Khusraw I in Persia after Justinian allegedly closed the academy in 529 might be both exaggerated and spurious (cf. Lynch, *Aristotle’s School* 166ff) but at least demonstrates Roman awareness of a rival civilisation. Cf. ch. 3.1.

⁴³ Herrin, *Formation of Christendom*, 52f. As when Grod, king of the Huns, was baptised on invitation from emperor Justinian I, or when the ruler of the Turkish Onogurs let his nephew Kovrat be baptised and brought up at the court of Heraclius (Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 87-9).

⁴⁴ Hodges, “Pirenne and the Question of Demand” 6f, Lopez, “The Role of Trade in the Economic Readjustment of Byzantium in the Seventh Century” 70, Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* 200ff.

⁴⁵ Sharf, *Jews and Other Minorities in Byzantium* 57, Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* 66ff.

⁴⁶ Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry* 43. Holum noted in Hohlfelder (ed.) *City, Town and Countryside* 65-70, how the originally profitable relationship between Roman power and rural Samaritans in Palestine broke up in mutual mistrust under Justinian I (cf. Malalas, *Chronographia* XVIII (447 Dind., 373 Thurn).

show signs of decline.⁴⁷ Phocas' revolution in 602, which started at the Balkan frontier, was long seen as the symbolic fall of curtain: a blow from a simple soldier directed at the imperial person, reminding of the unruly days in the third century.⁴⁸ It resulted in a twenty-year-long war with Persia, started by shah Khusraw II on the Near Eastern frontier.⁴⁹ With the destruction of the Roman city centres and monasteries around the whole coast from Alexandria to Ephesus by the Persians, a severe blow was dealt not only to the Roman thalassocracy, but to the ancient world as a whole.⁵⁰ Apocalypticism was in the air; and before the empire had time to recover, a new conquest took it totally by surprise, a conquest that would become lasting: that of the Muslim Arabs.

Discussing the geopolitical situation of the empire less than a century before, Menander Protector had described the Arabs in the following manner:

There are innumerable Arab tribes, and most of them are desert-dwellers and have no leader; some of them are subject to the Romans, other ones to the Persians. When Justinian, a broadminded and most kingly man, found this to be the case he sent gifts in times of peace to the Arabs on the Persian side as well, but Justin [II], who was proud and cared little for the minds of barbarians, only showed despal for the Persian Arabs. Now, they are a very greedy race, and when they found that the sendings had ceased, they asked the Persian king not to leave it unheeded ... for the Arabs claimed that they had received the money in order to keep the peace and abstain from attacking the Romans, and they claimed that this was the state of affairs. But [the Roman envoy] John, seeing that their claim was not true, said: "If anybody else than the all-great Khusraw [I, the Persian shah] had stood up for the unjust claims of the Arabs, this would not have been any issue of importance."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Durliat, *De la ville antique à la ville Byzantine* 590f.

⁴⁸ Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 57ff, 69ff, 353.

⁴⁹ Officially to revenge his former protector, emperor Maurice, whom Phocas had killed, but arguably with more far-reaching universalist claims: Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth*, 30.

⁵⁰ Foss, "The Persians in Asia Minor and the end of Antiquity" 721-747, Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival* 13. Spain tacitly slipped out of Roman control at the same time as the Near east was lost to the Arabs (Kaegi, *Heraclius, emperor of Byzantium* 226).

⁵¹ τὰ γὰρ Σαρακηνικὰ φύλα μυριάδες ταῦτα, καὶ τὸ πλεῖστον αὐτῶν ἐρημονόμοι τε εἰσὶ καὶ ἀδέσποτοι, καὶ μὲν οὖν τῆς Ῥωμαίων, ἐστὶν ἅ καὶ τῆς Περσῶν ὑπήκοα πολιτείας. οὕτω δὲ διακεκριμένων αὐτῶν, Ἰουστινιανός, μεγάλῳφρων ἀνὴρ καὶ βασιλικώτατος, τοὺς μηδίζοντας Σαρακηνῶν δώροις ἐδεξιόυτο κρατούσης εἰρήνης. ὁ δὲ

For the swiftness and effectivity of the Arabic conquest, many different explanations have been presented: fervour of new Muslims,⁵² overpopulation of the Arabic peninsula,⁵³ affinity of Semitic peoples,⁵⁴ Monophysite sympathies towards Islam,⁵⁵ the discouraging politics of emperor Maurice against the pro-Roman tribes of Ghassan,⁵⁶ or even the story about Arabs refusing to take more wages for peace, since the money had been handed over to them by an eunuch.⁵⁷ But John J. Saunders was probably most to the point: “Bedouin *raids* on the towns and villages of Syria and Iraq had been going on since the dawn of history, and occasionally an Arab tribe would set up a semi-civilized kingdom on the edge of the desert, as the Nabateans did at Petra or the Palmyrenes at Tadmur, but *conquests* only occurred at the rise of Islam.”⁵⁸ One might sharpen this argument yet a little: the question is not how the Arabs won a war over the Romans but how they won a peace in a region where different authorities had experienced problems – how the temporary raiding of Bedouin warriors did transform into a lasting Islamic conquest incorporating a complex civil population.⁵⁹

Religion was a motivator for the Arab expansion – beginning in the Hijaz around 622 to reach France and China in 733 and 751 respectively – and it has remained a unifying component among the desert nomads to this day; but the challenges Islam met

Ἰουστίνος ἐμβριθῆς τε ὦν καὶ βαρβάρῳ φρονήματι ἤκιστα ὑποχαλῶν ἐν οὐδενὶ λόγῳ ἐποιήσατο τοὺς ὅσοι ἐμήδιζον τῶν Σαρακηνῶν. οἱ δὲ πλεονεκτικώτατον γὰρ τὸ φύλλον ἀποκοπῆν τοῦτο ἠγησάμενοι τῷ βασιλεῖ ἐνέκειντο Περσῶν μὴ περιδεῖν αὐτοὺς αὐτῷ ἀνακειμένους ... δισχυρίζοντο γὰρ πως οἱ Σαρακηνοί, ὡς ὑπὲρ τοῦ εἰρήνην ἄγειν καὶ μὴ καταθέειν τὴν Ῥωμαίων τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐκομίζοντο χρήματα, ἐντευθέν τε ἐβιάζοντο τὴν τοῦ πράγματος φύσιν. ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης, ὡς ἑώρα σφᾶς οὐ κατὰ τὸ δέον τὸ ἐπίκλημα ποιουμένους, εἶπεν· εἰ μὲν ἕτερός τις, καὶ οὐχὶ Χοσρόης ὁ πάνυ, ξυνεπελαμβάνετο τοῖς ἀδίκως ἐπεγκαλοῦσι Σαρακηνοῖς, ἦττον ἂν ὑπῆρχε δεινόν.
Menander Protector, *Fragm* 9,1:30-40, 44-50.

⁵² Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemange* 130f.

⁵³ Caetani, “The Art of War of the Arabs” 10.

⁵⁴ Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze des byzantinischen Reiches*, 1-3.

⁵⁵ Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 311.

⁵⁶ Nöldeke, *Die Ghassanische Fürsten aus dem Hause Gafna's* 27-33.

⁵⁷ Theoph. *Chronographia*, AM 6123. This is vaguely similar to a story told in the Slavonic version of the *Doctrina Iacobi*, where a Roman *candidatus* in Caesarea is sewed into a camel skin by angry Arabs for having refused them to “trade from Roman lands”. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 59.

⁵⁸ Saunders, “The Nomad as Empire Builder” 81 (39).

⁵⁹ “Political discourse now came to be directed at the non-Muslim subjects of an emerging territorial state.”
Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest* 167.

among the bedouins and in the “Barbarian Plains”⁶⁰ were totally different from the ones it met in the Byzantine Mediterranean and Near east.⁶¹ These were heartlands of the *Mare nostrum* where three of the Roman church’s five patriarchs – Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem – had been residing.⁶² For the Late Antiquity *oikoumene* staying in the realms of the caliphate, the Imperial image had guaranteed the standard of the coins used for everyday trade as well as religious and juridical unity, the upkeep of roads and communications, and perhaps most of all: the peace and security upon which the economy relied.⁶³ Apocalyptic feelings of mistrust and despair might have affected the way in which former Roman subjects accepted the coming of the Arabs, but it would not explain the active role which they often came to play in the new empire.⁶⁴ To give Islam a lasting attraction not only for a strong but decentralised group of tribal warriors,⁶⁵ this civil population must have been won for the Islamic world.⁶⁶

The nature of this transition was not that “Romans” transformed into “Muslims”, as either an over-simplified reading of the traditional *Futūḥ* literature, or an over-simplified conception about the cultural implications of Roman rule might suggest. Neither should the cultural continuity and pluralism of the conquered areas be used as an argument to claim that the Islamic conquest was a superficial phenomenon or a literary product. Psychologically speaking, the Islamic conquest was a literary product no more and no less than the Roman had been, but literary products are realities of their own with a meaning to their receivers.⁶⁷ From this point of view, the initial transition did not take place under the raiding of the Arab invaders, but with the construction of a language of power and interaction that made the new religion take the a role similar to that which the unifying Roman power already had played to the Mediterranean.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Elisabeth Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain* 1ff.

⁶¹ Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth* 160.

⁶² From the Persian invasions until 969, the patriarchs of Antioch resided in Constantinople.

⁶³ Lewis, “Did the Dark Ages Exist?” 45ff.

⁶⁴ Schick, *The Christian Communities in Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* 11.

⁶⁵ Cf. Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam* 1-5.

⁶⁶ Pentz, *The Invisible Conquest: The Ontogenesis of Sixth and Seventh Century Syria* 16ff.

⁶⁷ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins* 30-31, Paret, “The Legendary Futuh Literature” 1-13 (163-176).

⁶⁸ The question posed in a 1998 PhD thesis (Herbst, *The Medieval Art of Spin*) “Why did so many Byzantines obey the emperor?” might here be modified to “Why did so many Byzantines submit to the caliph?”

1.1. Farewell to Syria

When Heraclius left Shimshat to enter Roman lands, he turned around in the direction of to Syria and said: “I have always hailed you as a one does who comes to you; but today, o Syria, I hail thee as a one does who separates from you. No Roman will return to you without feeling fear, till the birth of the Misfortunate one – oh, if he were never born!”⁶⁹

Flavius Heraclius (r. 610-641) is possibly the last Roman emperor to figure in widespread historical narratives long after his death and the disappearance of his empire.⁷⁰ But rather than a monumental statue like his predecessors, he appears like a complex mosaic, more the like of Alexander the great than of Julius Caesar.⁷¹ The Islamic conquests, which took place during his reign and which has given rise to much of the legends about him, are shrouded in legends too, which has caused some modern scholars to reject the credibility of almost the whole era.⁷² Such positivist doubts have proven beneficial insofar as they have opened our eyes for sources which previously might have been neglected and forgotten.⁷³ But they have also shown a certain lack of understanding for the nature and meaning of the historical narratives themselves.⁷⁴ As it was concisely put by Julie Scott Meisami, “history is the presentation of a ‘usable’ past.”⁷⁵ To us, it might be of initial interest to consider which roles the rulers in the era of transition – Heraclius, ‘Umar and Mu‘awiyah – have come to take.

⁶⁹ Iammā fašala Hirāqlu min Šimšāta dāhīlani r-Rūma l-tafat ʾilā Sūrīya fa-qāla qad kuntu sallamtu ʾilayka taslīma l-musāfirī fa-ʾammā l-yawma fa-ʾilayka s-salāmu yā Sūrīya taslīma l-mufāriqi wa-lā yuʾāwidu ʾilayka Rūmīyun ʾabadan ʾillā ḥāʾifan ḥattā yuwalada l-mawlūd ul- mašʾūmu wa-ʾitiha lam yuwalad, Tab. *Tārīḥ* I:2396. “The Misfortunate one” belongs to Muslim eschatology; cf. 1.3.2.

⁷⁰ In fact as late as in the 1728 Swahili epic *Kyuo kya Herekali*, the “Book of Heraclius” (which is, curiously enough, also the oldest known written document in the Swahili language). It retells the war between Romans and Arabs from a Muslim point of view. Appearances of Heraclius in Western Baroque literature at almost the same time are briefly reviewed by Brandes, “Heraclius between Restoration and Reform” 17 n1.

⁷¹ Reinink, “Heraclius, the New Alexander”, 81-94.

⁷² Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origin* 22f.

⁷³ Ibid., 25f. Cf. also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* esp. 591-598.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 30f, 206.

⁷⁵ Meisami, *Persian Historiography* 12.

1.1.1. At Crossroads

The Romans have been vanquished
in the nearby land, but after being vanquished they will be victorious again
within a few years; God is master over the past and the future
and on that day, the Believers will rejoice
over His help. He helps whom he wants; He is both mighty and compassionate.⁷⁶

In 610, Heraclius, a Roman officer from Carthage, had overthrown and killed the usurper Phocas in Constantinople.⁷⁷ With the imperial command and its challenges on all frontiers, he inherited a war started by the Persian shah Khusraw II, in which he was initially not successful neither military nor diplomatically.⁷⁸ In 613, the Persians captured Syria, reached the Mediterranean and split the empire in two parts.⁷⁹ In 614, Jerusalem was stormed, a shocking event⁸⁰ the news of which seems to have reached the Prophet Muhammad,⁸¹ who had received his first revelation in the same year as Heraclius came to power.⁸² Whatever his

⁷⁶ Ġulibatu r-Rūmu fī ʿadnā l-arḍi wa-hum min baʿdi ġalibahim sa-yaġlibūna fī biḍʿi sinīna li-llāhi l-amru min qablu wa-min baʿdu wa yawmaʿ dīn yafraḥu l mūʿminūna bi-naṣri llāhi yaṣūru man yaṣāʿu wa-huwa l-ʿazīzu r-raḥīmu, Q 30:1-5. There is a controversy on whether the verb ġalaba should be read as ġulibat (passive) or ġalabat (active), which might give the verse a totally opposite meaning. The overwhelming majority of the commentators, however, rely on the present interpretation. Cf. Tabari’s *Tafsīr* to sura 30 for a full discussion.

⁷⁷ Phocas has a very bad reputation in Byzantine memory (still echoed by Stratos in *Byzantium in the Sixth Century*, 89ff.) but not in the west: the pope Gregory I, for example, dedicated to him a grateful inscription on the so-called Column of Phocas in the Forum Romanum, the last monument to be dedicated there.

⁷⁸ Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 49-52.

⁷⁹ The importance of this conquest is much debated; Foss suggests – based upon the archaeological evidence of Northern Syria – that it might have marked the actual point when the Roman aristocracy left the country, obstructing later efforts to re-romanise it (“Syria in Transition” 258-68).

⁸⁰ In the words of Antiochus of Mar Saba, *Holy churches were burned with fire, others were demolished, majestic altars fell prone, sacred crosses were trampled underfoot, life-giving icons were spat upon by the unclean. Then their wrath fell upon priests and deacons: they slew them in their churches like dumb animals ...* transl. (from a Georgian original) Conybeare 506. For Antiochus accusing the Jews for the slaughter, see Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response* 79-84, and Schick, *The Christian Communities in Palestine* 33ff.

⁸¹ Götz, “Zum historischen Hintergrund von Sure 30, 1-5” 116-117.

⁸² Tradition holds that Muhammad was forty years old at the time of his first revelation; however, his traditional year of birth could be placed already in the 540s according according to some inscriptions. Rippin, *Muslims* 32.

attitude towards the Roman empire,⁸³ he is likely to have felt pity for the destruction of the city, to which he used to pray at this stage, and to which tradition says that he was taken by divine grace some years later.⁸⁴

In Jerusalem, the Persians are said to have captured the True Cross, according to legend found there by Helen, the mother of Constantine the great, and kept in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The perhaps most interesting thing about this relic, which has multiplied itself ever since, is that it makes two important historical appearances which are both related to propagandistic efforts of the Roman state to identify Christianity with the empire:⁸⁵ under Constantine and now under Heraclius, who would make it the cause and symbol for the Roman reconquest of the Jerusalem. Ferdowsi, confusing the capture of the cross with the victory of Shapur over Valerian in 235, would later ascribe the following haughty words to Khusraw on the Roman requests to get the cross back:

That gibbet of Isa [Jesus] was not worth the trouble which the Shah Ardashir took of placing it in the treasury. If I send a piece of wood from Iran to Rum, the whole of my realm will laugh at me; it will seem to my priests that I have become a Christian and that for Maryam's sake I have turned presbyter.⁸⁶

The humbled Roman reaction in face of the Persian onslaught is proven by a (probably genuine) letter from the Roman administration to Khusraw Parviz.⁸⁷

⁸³ The battle at Mu'ta, where Muslims and Romans are said to have first clashed, should have taken place in 629, as Muhammad still lived.

⁸⁴ The Qur'anic verse (Q 21:1: *Praise be to God, who in the night made His servant travel from the holy mosque to the distant sanctuary, whose surroundings We have blessed*) referring to the event is not very informative on the topography; the historian is of course curious to know whether the mystic experience was in any way affected by the rumours from the afflictions the city had gone through at the time. Cf. the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Kathir to sura 17 – quoting a tradition of az-Zuhri which dates the event one year before the *hiğra*, which would be in 621 – as well as Mango, “The Temple Mount, 614-638” 4-5, Busse, “The Destruction of the Temple and its Reconstruction in the Light of Sura 17:2-8” 1-17 and van Ess, “Die Himmelfahrt Muhammads und die frühe islamische Theologie”. Tabari notes (*Tārīḫ* I:2409) that when 'Umar entered the Temple mount in 638, it was filled with rubbish, but on this particular spot it was related to the much earlier Roman destruction.

⁸⁵ Dinkler, “Das Kreuz als Siegeszeichen” 9-13.

⁸⁶ Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāme* (transl. Levy) 189.

⁸⁷ *We beg ... of your clemency to consider Heraclius, our most pious emperor, as a true son, one who is eager to perform the service of your serenity in all things ... And hereafter we shall be in enjoyment of tranquility through*

In 622, the year of the *hiġra*, Heraclius went into the offensive, Constantinople now being threatened on its both fronts, by the Persians from Anatolia and by the Avars from the Balkans.⁸⁸ It was a precarious moment for Roman power, but Muhammad’s prediction turned out to become true: Heraclius began a successful campaign, leading his troops with the help from Gök Turks over the Armenian mountains, destroying the fire-temple at Takht-e-Suleyman, routing the Persian army at Niniveh, right into the inner lands of Mesopotamia, resulting in panic and dissolution of Sassanid power.⁸⁹ There exists a certain parallelism between the lives of Heraclius and Muhammad during the same course of time.⁹⁰ The triumph of Roman Christianity at the overthrow of Khusraw (628) was set to words by the court poet of Heraclius, George of Pisidia, in Constantinople:

O Rome, pass the equal verdict:

Say, how many soldiers, do you think you would have to bring up
to equal the Ruler?

“Even if I was alone”, he might say, “I would have no equal.” [...]

The ancient monster, slain by Heracles,

was not like the one which Heraclius, the Ruler, quenched:

the monster of the Tyrant did not destroy one city,

but ravaged the entire community.⁹¹

It seems unclear whether George ever became known on a wider level in Syria,⁹² but an open praise of the imperial politics there is hinted in a somewhat different form in the Syrian *Legend of Alexander* which appeared in Edessa around 630.⁹³

your gifts, which will be remembered for ever, receiving an opportunity and keeping your benefaction free from oblivion for the eternal duration of the Roman state. Chronicon Paschale (transl. Whitby) 709.

⁸⁸ Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* 117-121. The legendary meeting with the Avar khan, from which Heraclius literally had to flee with the crown under his arm, took place in June 623.

⁸⁹ Howard-Johnston “Heraclius Persian Campaigns”.

⁹⁰ The Muslims had also reasons to rejoice, since the downfall of Sassanid power facilitated the subsequent Arabic invasions. el Cheikh, “Sūrat ar-Rūm” 362; Shaban, *Islamic History A. D. 600-750* 28ff, 46ff.

⁹¹ Ῥώμη, δίκασε τὴν ἰσόρροπον κρίσιν· πολλῶν στρατηγῶν εὐπορήσασα φράσον ποίῳ δοκεῖ σοι συμβαλεῖν τὸν δεσπότην· ἄΜόνος τετάχθωά φησίν, ἄοὺκ ἔχων ἴσονά ... τὸ πρὶν φονευθὲν κῆτος ἐξ Ἡρακλέοθς, οἶον καθεῖλεν Ἡρακλῆς ὁ δεσπότης κῆτος τύραννον, οὐ μίαν φθειρόν πόλιν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκθερίζον τὴν πολιτείαν ὄλην. *Heraklias B* 1-4, 20-23 (p210).

As Muhammad struggled to unite the Arab tribes, Heraclius' challenge was to re-integrate the reconquered areas into the Roman empire.⁹⁴ We are well acquainted with the propagandistic side of this struggle, not only from legends and poems. On the 629 coins, the year after the death of Khusraw, Heraclius appears without the traditional Latin titles inherited from previous Roman emperors, now bearing the humble Greek title *basileus*, which simply means "king". This is remarkable, considering that the imperial title had once been invented due to the ancient Latin Roman abhorrence for kings.⁹⁵ It has been suggested that it was a deliberate imitation of the Persian *Shahinshah*, king of kings, but to the royal title it now added a sign of religious humility: "Basileus in Christ" as a clear identification of the empire as an administrative unity with its religious identity rather than the opposite.⁹⁶ The coins also depict a Cross on steps, which has been interpreted as a symbolic sign of Christian victory over the Iranian fire-temples of Zoroastrianism, the rival universalist religion in the region and possibly the main ideological threat in the Persian expansion.⁹⁷

These are symbols which cannot have been easily understood in the Western part of the empire, but might have given a certain echo in the East, which is crucial if we want to understand Heraclius' motivations. His reign was not uncontroversial: in 623, he had married his niece Martina, a scandalous event that would pursue him throughout his life and cause the senate to interfere with his succession.⁹⁸ But already Kaegi showed which resistance Heraclius had met from the very day of his coronation among the citizens from Cappadocia to Syria, which mistrusted his ability to protect their interests.⁹⁹ In fact, Roman military power *had* failed to protect the whole Levant and Anatolia from the Persians, and the cities there suffered hard under the Roman campaigns as well.¹⁰⁰ It does not mean that they had been

⁹² Whitby, "George of Pisidia's Presentation of Heraclius" 164, 170.

⁹³ Reinink, "Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende als politisch-religiöse Propagandaschrift für Herakleios' Kirchenpolitik". Here, of course, Heraclius is likened to Alexander the Great, whose crushing of the Achaemenid predecessors of the Sassanians was a legendary theme throughout the Middle ages. Cf. to Shahid, "The Iranian Factor in Byzantium during the Reign of Heraclius" 306.

⁹⁴ Haldon, "The Reign of Heraclius. A Context for Change?" 4ff. (Cf. also the introduction the same volume, xi.)

⁹⁵ Rösch, *Onoma Basileias* 37f, 106f.

⁹⁶ Shahid, "The Iranian Factor in Byzantium during the Reign of Heraclius" 297ff. Kaegi also notes Heraclius' choice of Biblical names for his children.

⁹⁷ Ericsson, "The Cross on Steps and the Silver Hexagram".

⁹⁸ Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 106. The children from this marriage were all born with defects.

⁹⁹ Kaegi, "New evidence on the early reign of Heraclius" 308ff.

¹⁰⁰ Kaegi, *Heraclius* 195f.

more favourable to the Persians, which had felt severe problems establishing their authority there.¹⁰¹ But after twenty years of war, the inhabitants of Syria, Egypt and Palestine must have felt a general suspicion or even hostility towards any imperialist agenda, be it Persian or Roman. One might imagine the troubles Heraclius or his advisors faced: all the separatist tendencies from the days of Justinian are recurrent in his Syrian campaign of 629-634 and his efforts to re-establish Roman power there.

First, we have the allegations about Jews helping the Persians.¹⁰² Especially when brought in connection with the fall of Jerusalem in 614 (the Persians are said to have left the city in the hands of a Jewish governor)¹⁰³ these accusations must be understood against the literary background of centuries during which Jews had been humiliated by the Roman imperial power, and Christians had regarded their humiliation as a confirmation of Christian superiority.¹⁰⁴ It might be worth mentioning that not only had the cross been kept in Jerusalem, but so had the treasures from the destroyed Jewish temple, symbolising Roman (and hence Orthodox Christian) victory over the Jews.¹⁰⁵ But even if reports on Jews slaughtering Christians in Jerusalem in 614 are heavily exaggerated, it was known – or presumed – that Jews, just like Christian heretics, often had a more amicable relation with Iranian society than with Roman.¹⁰⁶ The spread of anti-Judaism is traceable in the Mediterranean from the late sixth century,¹⁰⁷ and it is often seen as a fatal turn in the history of Jewish-Christian relations when Heraclius, after the reconquest of Jerusalem, had all Jews

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 97.

¹⁰² Schick, *The Christian Communities in Palestine* 26-31.

¹⁰³ van Bekkum, “Jewish Messianic Expectations in the Age of Heraclius” 103. He was later revoked from this position, and in fact Khusraw initiated unfavourable measures against the Jews as well.

¹⁰⁴ Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response* esp. ch. 2 and 4.

¹⁰⁵ Procopius (*Vandal Wars* 2.9) states that the Jewish treasures – possibly including the seven-branched Menorah well-known from the relief on the arch of Titus in Rome – were sent to the Christian churches in Jerusalem by Justinian when he had recovered them from the Vandals, which in turn had stolen it in Rome. The fate of those treasures after 614 is unknown.

¹⁰⁶ It is not my intention engage in the old discussion about the superiority of the Babylonian Talmud over the Jerusalemic, but it is anyway necessary to consider the enormous flourishing of Jewish culture in Mesopotamia under the Sassanids and later, which brought forth the former, even if the Roman provinces in Syria were not less full of learned and legendary Rabbis.

¹⁰⁷ Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry* 34-36, 44-50.

expelled from the city and baptised by force throughout the empire.¹⁰⁸ We must perhaps distinguish between imperial rhetorics and actual policies here: not only would mass conversions have been difficult to accomplish,¹⁰⁹ but Heraclius cannot have been unaware of the inevitable role Jews played for the Mediterranean and the importance of being on speaking terms with them, as proven from the fact that he received Jewish delegates as well, who complained over brutalities bestowed upon them.¹¹⁰

The next group on which the Mediterranean trade relied was the Aramaic-speaking Syrians.¹¹¹ Their sympathies towards Monophysitism had been alarming before, and if Heraclius' propagandistic measures in the case of the Jews were a threat, in the case of the Syrians they were a concession. On his way past Hierapolis in 631, he met the Monophysite patriarch Athanasios, an encounter which would prove fatal for his own reputation in Christian history: looking for a theological compromise by declaring that God had only one energy, and then, as an answer to the angry reactions from the Orthodox, forbidding further debate on the subject, Heraclius was accused of having brought his own faith into disrespect.¹¹² Interestingly, the Armenian chronicler Sebeos claims that Khusraw after the fall of Jerusalem in 614 had tried to take command over Christianity in the Near east by summoning a council between the different factions – initially also involving Jews – which

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Michael the Syrian: *A cette époque, l'empereur Heraclius prescrivit que tous les Juifs qui se trouvaient dans tous les pays de l'empire des Romains se fissent chrétiens. Pour ce motif, les Juifs s'enfurient des pays des Romains; ils vinrent d'abord à Édesse; ayant été de nouveau violentés en cet endroit, ils s'enfurient en Perse.* Michael Syriacus XI:4 (414).

¹⁰⁹ Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response* 86f.

¹¹⁰ Sharf, *Jews and Other Minorities in Byzantium* 99-101.

¹¹¹ As was already noted by Pirenne (*Mahomet et Charlemange*, 62ff). I have not discussed the role of the Samaritans here, though their loyalty had been at stakes already since Justinian. Cf. *City, Town and Countryside in the Early Byzantine Era* 65-70.

¹¹² Theophanes describes Athanasios as *a skilful and wicked man, who was filled with the cunning that is native to Syrians* and claims that after Heraclius had followed his advise, and then retracted his decision, the Monophysites *made a mockery of the catholic Church in taverns and baths, saying, "the Chalcedonians, who formerly held the views of Nestorios, came to their senses and returned to the truth when they united with us in the nature of Christ by way of one energy. Now, however, repenting what was right, they have lost on both coounts by confessing neither one nor two energies in Christ"* (*Chronographia* AM 6121, transl. Mango). The word "energy" was later replaced with the word "will", making Monoenergism to Monothelism, but the compromise did not please either side in the conflict.

declared Monophysitism to be the true form of Christianity.¹¹³ Whether Heraclius was aware of such an effort or not, he might have felt that without the popular support of the Monophysites, Roman unity in the eastern Mediterranean was a potentially dangerous matter about pockets of Orthodox Christians amidst weakened Roman garrisons.¹¹⁴

Collapse of Sassanid power had also made good relations inevitable with a third religious faction, which did not belong to the Mediterranean, since it only a century before had fared very badly under the sceptre of Justinian I, and instead had spread over Asia all the way to China: the Nestorians. Being fiercely opposed to both the Monophysites and the Orthodox in the Mediterranean area, they were numerous in Iran, and posed a potential threat in the east should they take a hostile attitude towards the Roman authority – in fact, Khusraw’s alleged pro-Monophysite policies during his later reign might have been a consequence of his fearing the increasing power of the Nestorians.¹¹⁵ As he would later do with Athanasios, Heraclius met the Nestorian catholicos Ishoyahb III on the way past Aleppo in 630, and even received communion from him.¹¹⁶

Finally but not least, looking beyond Syria, Heraclius could not sever himself from the rest of the empire, having been absent from Constantinople now for many years. He faced the same problem as had already his imperial predecessors, he had to be everywhere in the vast empire at one time, while maintaining the illusion that government was in one hand. The old propagandistic solution, proven many times before, was to hold a triumphal entry in the capital, which he also did in Constantinople in 629, when his new and aforementioned title, *pistos en Christo basileus*, was introduced both to him and to his son from the scandalous marriage with Martina.¹¹⁷ But it would seem that just another victory for the sake of the Roman empire was not really what the people in the recovered provinces expected.¹¹⁸

The triumphal entry of Heraclius into Jerusalem on the 21 of March 630 – the day of the Zoroastrian New Year – must be understood from several perspectives. It was not merely the reinstallation of the “piece of wood” recovered from the *Shahinshah*, but the propagation of unity among the peoples of the Christian world as well as a declaration that the Roman emperor was still defending universal law and order. It is left for posterity to ponder

¹¹³ *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, transl. Thomson 151-52 (p 117-18).

¹¹⁴ Schick, *The Christian Communities in Palestine* 11.

¹¹⁵ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 176ff.

¹¹⁶ Kaegi, *Heraclius* 213.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 186. Together with the son from his previous marriage.

¹¹⁸ Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* 251.

which aspect was more warmly greeted by the inhabitants of the Near east.¹¹⁹ Mango has argued that the Golden Gate was put in condition solely for the purpose of his triumph, and that Heraclius entered Jerusalem, carrying the Cross, from the Mount of Olives, heading over the Temple mount straight towards the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.¹²⁰ In popular mind, the gate became confused with the gate through which Christ had entered Jerusalem, and which, according to Hezechiel, should be shut for everybody but for the Messiah.¹²¹ Thus Hrabanus Maurus after 800 claimed that only when Heraclius dismounted in humility and took off his Imperial garments, an angel appeared and opened the walled gate to Jerusalem for the emperor.¹²² This legend might have caught some of the actual feelings and expectations among people witnessing what they must have seen either as a supernatural event, or an expression of imperial hybris, although it has two crucial points wrong: the Golden gate was not walled up when Heraclius entered Jerusalem,¹²³ neither had it anything directly with Christ to do.¹²⁴ It would, however, soon be walled up forever, demonstrating to this day that no Roman emperor ever entered the city again.

1.1.2. The Prophet

From the ocean, that is from Scotland and Britain, Spain and France, Italy, Greece and Thrace, to Antioch and Syria, Persia and Anatolia, Egypt and Africa and beyond Africa, were the Roman lands until today, and it seemed the foundations of this empire were made of bronze and marble ... but today we see Rome humbled.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ The description echoed by the Arabic chroniclers – *carpets were spread out and incense was burned* all along the road to Jerusalem, writes Tabari (*Tārīḥ* I:1561f) – has a certain Nemesis in them: and what, actually, did poorer people of Syria and Palestine really think if they saw through such excesses?

¹²⁰ Mango, “The Temple Mount, AD 614-638” 15.

¹²¹ *Hez.* 44:1-3.

¹²² Hrabanus Maurus, *Homiliae de Festis Praecipuis etc.* 131ff.

¹²³ Mango, *op. cit.*

¹²⁴ Who had entered through S:t Stephens Gate, north of the Golden Gate.

¹²⁵ ἀπὸ γὰρ τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ τουτέστι τῆς Σκοτίας καὶ Βρεττανίας καὶ Σπανίας καὶ Φραγγίας καὶ Ἰταλίας καὶ Ἑλλάδος καὶ Θράκης . . καὶ ἕως ἔ’Αντιοχείας καὶ Συρίας καὶ Περσίδος καὶ πάσης ἀνατολῆς καὶ Αἰγύπτου καὶ Ἀφρικῆς καὶ ἄνωθεν Ἀφρικῆς τὰ ὅρια τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἕως σήμερον καὶ αἱ στήλαι τῶν βασιλέων αὐτῶν διὰ

In the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*, a piece of anti-Jewish polemics dated immediately after the victory of Heraclius, we catch some glimpses of a Mediterranean world plagued by feelings of unrest and mistrust. While it tries to convince a group of newly converted Jews about the advantages of Orthodox Christianity in times of distress, it struggles to disavow its different rivals. Thereby it totally *en passant* stumbles upon what seems to be the first non-Muslim reference to Muhammad:¹²⁶

When I came to Sykamina, I spoke to a certain old man who was well-informed in the scriptures, and I said to him: “What do you say, my lord and teacher, about the Prophet who has risen among the Arabs?” And he said to me, while he groaned deeply: “That is rubbish; do prophets come armed with sword and chariot? These are simply the works of anarchy ...”¹²⁷

According to Muslim tradition, the Prophet Muhammad had already proclaimed himself as the Messenger of God in official letters sent to the rulers of the world:¹²⁸ Heraclius, Khusraw, the kings of Yemen, Bahrain and Oman, and to Coptic Egypt.¹²⁹ The story is still popular in the Muslim world today, some of the alleged originals of the letters (whose genuinity has been much debated)¹³⁰ being in possession by the Hashemite king in Amman.¹³¹ The wording is identical with the one quoted by all traditional Arabic chroniclers:

χαλκῶν καὶ μαρμάρων φαίνονται ... σήμερον δὲ θεωροῦμεν τὴν Ῥωμανίαν ταπεινωθεῖσαν. *Doctrina Iacobi* III:9 p 62 l 6-12.

¹²⁶ The author obviously has no idea about the influence this particular prophet would have. He goes on to say that the Prophet claims to possess “the keys to paradise” which the speaker finds “incredible”.

¹²⁷ καὶ ἀπελθόντος μου εἰς Συκάμινα ἀνεθέμην τινὶ γέροντι γραφικῶ πάνυ καὶ λέγω αὐτῷ· Τί μοι λέγεις, περὶ τοῦ προφήτου τοῦ ἀναφανέντος μετὰ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν; καὶ λέγει μοι ἀναστενάξας μέγα· ὅτι πλάνος ἐστίν. μὴ γὰρ οἱ προφήται μετὰ ξίφους καὶ ἄρματος ἔρχονται; ὄντως ἀκαταστασίας ἔργα εἰσὶ... *Doctrina Iacobi* V:16 p 86 l 17-21.

¹²⁸ See Bashear, “The Mission of Dihya al-Kalbi and the Situation in Syria” for an interesting interpretation of this mission in relation to Heraclius’ religious policies in Syria.

¹²⁹ Actually “Alexandria”. Tabari *Tārīḥ* I:1561. The identity of this Muqawqis seems a bit dubious: cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 579ff.

¹³⁰ Hamidullah, *Six originaux des lettres diplomatiques du Prophete de l’Islam*. (In fact, Hamidullah admitted in a previous article, *RSO* 1963 57, that “il y a certes des faits gênants” as that three of these letters were found in Damascus in the 19th century, or that a letter, which according to the tradition was torn into pieces by the shah and thrown in the Tigris, could have been bought by the Lebanese foreign minister in the Second world war.)

In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful; from Muhammad, slave of God and prophet, to Heraclius, lord of the Romans; peace be upon the rightly guided. I come to you with a call for submission; submit, and you will live in peace.¹³²

The last imperative – *ʿaslim taslim* – is almost a proverb in Arabic, affirming the verb root *salama* (to be in peace), which requires submission (*Islām*). Heraclius is said to have received it with honour and to have laid it “between his thighs.”¹³³

Several near eastern chronicles claim that Heraclius had forebodings about the event.¹³⁴ After his triumphal entry in Jerusalem, the emperor is said to have had a dream in which his power now was predicted to be overthrown by a circumcised man. This having upset him, he decided the next morning to kill all Jews in the Roman empire, but was prevented by the sudden appearance of an Arabian messenger who spoke about the new Prophet who had risen among his people. When told that the Arabs were also circumcised, Heraclius understood his dream in a completely new light.¹³⁵ This tradition is especially interesting for the fact that it has taken notice of the emperor’s anti-Jewish politics and, perhaps unconsciously, put them in relation to the rise of Islam.¹³⁶ In the Muslim version, the description is put in the mouth of Abu Sufyan, an opponent of Muhammad at the time, who was trading in Syria after having obtained an armistice with the emerging Muslims.

In the version retold in most Muslim compilations of both *hadith* and historical chronicles, the story then takes a more fantastic turn, as Abu Sufyan is invited to Heraclius in order to answer different questions about the new Prophet. Abu Sufyan, being put in midst of other Arabs in order that he might not lie in their presence, answers truthfully, and at the end Heraclius tells him:

¹³¹ Nadia Maria el Cheikh, “Muhammads Letter to Heraclius: a Question of Legitimacy?” 11n.

¹³² bi-smi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīmi min Muḥammadin ʿabdi llāhi wa-rasūluḥū ʿilā Hiraqla ʿazīmi r-Rūmi salāman ʿalā man atbaʿa alhudā ʿammā baʿdu fa-ʿinnī adʿūka bi-dīʿayati l-islāmi aslim taslim. Cf. Yaʿqubi II:83-84.

¹³³ ǧaʿalaha bayna faḥḍayhi wa-ḥāṣiratihi, Tabari, *Tārīḥ* I:1561.

¹³⁴ Thus it is not only a story related to Muslim narratives (cf. the Coptic *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, PO I:489ff).

¹³⁵ Tabari, *Tārīḥ* I:1561-2.

¹³⁶ Cf. the certain attraction which the rumours about Muhammad seems to have had on Jews in the *Doctrina Jacobi*, and below, 1.1.3, for early views of Islam.

I asked you about his origin, and you said he is one of your most talented relatives; and that is what signifies a prophet among his relatives. I asked you if one of you ever has made any similar claims before, and you said no; that I asked, since if one of you had said anything similar before, I would have said that he is simply imitating his predecessors. I asked you if any of your ancestors had been of royal birth, and you said no; I asked, because if any of your ancestors had been of royal birth, I would have said that this is a man who grabs for his father's power. I asked you if you have caught him with a lie before he started with his claims, and you said no; and I knew that nobody who abstains from lies among men would ever lie to God. I asked you if the rich or the poor are following him, and you said it was the poor; and it is always they who follow prophets. And I asked you if they are increasing or decreasing in numbers, and you said they are increasing; and so it is with truth before it is fulfilled. I asked you if any single of his followers has shown weakness of faith since he entered it, and you said no; and that is a truth founded in the willingness of heart. I asked you if he is a traitor, and you said no; and no prophet is a traitor. I asked you what he asks from you, and you said he requests from you to worship God, and put nothing at his side, and to abstain from all other kinds of worship, that he encourages you to pray, show faithfulness and loyalty. If you are telling the truth, he will rule over the ground under my feet. I knew he would come, but not that he might be one of your people. Alas, if I had known that; I would have come to him and met with him; if I were with him I would wash his feet.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ sa^oaltuka ^oan nasabihī fa-ḍakarta ^oannahū fī-kum ḍū nasabin, fa-ka-ḍālika r-rusulu tub^oatu fī nasabi qawmihā. wa-sa^oaltuka hal qāla ^oaḥadun minkum hādā l-qawla fa-ḍakarta ^oan lā, fa-qultu: law kāna ^oaḥadun hādā qablahū, la-qultu rasulun ya^otasī bi-qawlin qīla qablahū. wa-sa^oaltuka hal kāna min ābā^oika min malikin fa-ḍakarta ^oan lā, qultu: fa-law kāna min ābā^oika min malikin, qultu raḡulun yaṭlubu mulka ^oabihī wa-sa^oaltuka: hal kuntum ta-tahimūnahū bi-l-kaḍbi qabla ^oan yaqūla mā qāla fa-ḍakarta ^oan lā, fa-qad ^oa^orifu annahū lam yakun li-yadara l-kaḍba ^oalā n-nāsi wa-yakḍiba ^oalā l-lāhi. wa-sa^oaltuka: ^oašrāfu n-nāsi atb^oūhu ^oām ḍu^oadāw^ouhum fa-ḍakarta ^oanna ḍu^oafā^oahum atba^oūhu, wa-hum atb^oū r-rusuli. wa-sa^oaltuka: ^oa-yazīdūna ^oām yanqušūna fa-ḍakarta: ^oa-yazīdūna, wa-ka-ḍālika ^oamru l-^oaymāni ḥattā yatimma. wa-sa^oaltuka: ^oa-yartaddu aḥadun saḥṭatan li-dīnihī ba^oda ^oan yadhūla fihī fa-ḍakarta lā, wa-ka-ḍālika l-^oaymānu ḥīna tuḥālṭu bašāṣatuhū l-qulūba. wa-sa^oaltuka: hal yaḡdiru? fa-ḍakarta ^oan lā, wa-ka-ḍālika r-rusulu lā taḡdiru. wa-sa^oaltuka: bi-mā ya^omurukum? fa-ḍakarta ^oannahū ya^omurukum ^oan ta^obudū llāha wa-lā tušrikū bihī šay^oan, wa-yanhākum ^oan ^oibādati l-^oawṭāni. wa-

The story ends with Heraclius trying to convince the Romans to recognise Muhammad as a prophet, and his failure to do so, and there are additional reports about a Christian bishop being lynched by his community for Muslim sympathies.¹³⁸ Again, it is interesting to note how a far echo of Heraclius' actual politics seems to have influenced the popular mind: being rejected as unorthodox and godless after his concessions to the Monophysites, his edict about the one energy of God might have been interpreted in a completely new manner by the Muslims or the Syrians in the next generation.

Of course, the legend defended its position in the Muslim tradition because of its miraculous predictions concerning the rise and truth of Islam, culminating in the words of Heraclius as he is informed about the piety of the Muslims (“they are warriors by day and monks by night”): “They will inherit the land on which I stand”.¹³⁹ Although being the protagonist, Heraclius makes a humble figure, and in Shi'i tradition, his sympathetic behaviour towards Islam basically serves as an antithesis to the haughty manner in which his enemy Khusraw Parviz is said to have received Muhammad's letter: he tore it into pieces and declared the Prophet mad. Therefore, concludes Qummi in his *tafsir* to sura 30, was it already predicted that “the Believers will rejoice” at the victory of the Romans over the Persians.¹⁴⁰ Yet unrealistic¹⁴¹ or contradicting¹⁴² as these reports might be, it is noteworthy that the Muslim transmitters at least *tried* to imagine Heraclius' encounter with Islam and his “farewell to Syria”,¹⁴³ where the Byzantine sources keep totally silent on the matter.¹⁴⁴

Another fact deserves special attention: namely, why Abu Sufyan is given as the original source in the Muslim story about Heraclius. Abu Sufyan was the father of Mu'awiyah, who founded the 'Umayyad empire, literally speaking on the land where Heraclius had stood.

ya^omurukum bi-ṣ-ṣalāti wa-ṣidqi wa-l-^oafāfi, fa-^oin kāna mā taqūlu ḥaqqan fa-sa-yamliku mawḍi^oa qasamīya hātayni. wa-qad kuntu ^oannahū ḥārīḡun lam ^oakun ^oaẓunnu ^oannahū minkum fa-law ^oannī ^oa^olamu ^oannī ^oaḥluṣu ^oilayhi la-taḡaṣṣamtu li-qā^oatin, wa-law kuntu ^oindahū la-ḡasaltu ^oan qadamihī. Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 1:6:7.

¹³⁸ Tabari, *Tārīḥ* I:1566f.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 2395.

¹⁴⁰ Qummī, *Tafsīr* 152.

¹⁴¹ Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 236.

¹⁴² Khusraw was killed in 628, already vanquished before, Heraclius visited Jerusalem and Syria in 630.

¹⁴³ Cf. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origin* 211.

¹⁴⁴ Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 256, “Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest” 139-149, and below (1.1.3).

Moshe Sharon traced a much older legend of legitimacy here, which did not so much concern the Prophet or Islam, but the transferral of Syria from “Heraclian” to “Umayyad” rule.¹⁴⁵

1.1.3. Raiders and Conquerors

(Ka’b said to ‘Umar:) God once sent a prophet to the Fallen one and said: “Rejoice, o Jerusalem! To you Faruq will come and cleanse you.” He sent another prophet to Constantinople, who stood on its hills and said: “O Constantinople! What did your kinsmen do to My house? They laid it waste, and made you its equal instead ... One day, I will make you barren.”¹⁴⁶

Whereas the later Muslim *Futūḥ* literature gives a grandiose picture of the defeat of the Romans and the Persians under the first Muslim Caliphs,¹⁴⁷ contemporary Roman and non-Muslim eyewitness descriptions are void of references to Islam, which has consternated many scholars.¹⁴⁸ What seems clear is that the increased Arab raiding into the weakened Roman territories, which must have passed a deciding point somewhere in the year 634,¹⁴⁹ caused fear and panic among the civil population.¹⁵⁰ In Jerusalem, the patriarch Sophronius – who had

¹⁴⁵ Sharon, “The Birth of Islam in the Holy Land” 227.

¹⁴⁶ (Fa-)ba^oaṭa llāhu nabīyan ^oalā l-kunāsati fa-qāla ^oabširā ^oŪrī-šalam ^oilayka l-Fārūq yunaqqīka mim mā fika wa-bu^oṭa ^oilā l-Qusṭanṭīniyata nabī fa-qāma ^oilā tallahā fa-qāla yā Qusṭanṭīniyata mā fa^oala ^oahluka bi-bayṭi ^oaḥrabaha wa-šabbahūka [...] qaḍaytu ^oilayka ^oin ^oaḡa^oalaka ḡalḡā^oun yawman mā ... Tabari, *Tārīḥ* I:2409. Cf. *Zechariah* 9. ‘Umar (called Faruq) had entered Jerusalem on a donkey, accompanied by the Yemenite Jew Ka’b, who quoted these words when they had entered the desolated Temple Mount to pray there.

¹⁴⁷ Paret, “The Traditional Futuh Literature” 1-13.

¹⁴⁸ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 180. It is important to remember that the terminology is only unanimously clear when it uses the Syriac word *mhaggriye* to distinguish Muslim Arabs from other Arabs.

¹⁴⁹ This was the year of the alleged debate between Jews and Christians in the *Doctrina Jacobi*, and its importance seems to be confirmed by a short notice found in the *Syriac Chronicle of Thomas the Presbyter*: ... on Friday 4 February (634) at the ninth hour, there was a battle between the Romans and the Arabs of Muhammad in Palestine twelve miles east of Gaza. The Romans fled, leaving behind the patrician ... whom the Arabs killed. Some 4000 poor villagers of Palestine were killed there, Christians, Jews and Samaritans. The Arabs ravaged the whole region. Transl. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 120.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 23, 63, 117ff., 262 a. o.

once described the fall of the city to the Persians –¹⁵¹ held a Christmas sermon that year, where he lamented the fact that the Christians could not reach Bethlehem any more out of fear for the Arabs.¹⁵² As the threat showed no signs to subside during the following years, the tone in his preachings took a more dramatic turn:

Why are so many wars fought among us? Why are the barbarian raids multiplying? How come so many Arab troops are attacking us? For what reason does all this rape and pillage take place? Why is human blood being ceaselessly shed? Why are the birds of the heaven devouring bodies of men? Why are churches torn down, why is the Cross debased? (...) The God-hating Arabs and destructors, the terror from the desert which has been clearly foretold by the Prophets, are coming over places where they do not belong, plundering the cities, destroying the fields, setting fire to the villages, burning the holy churches and deluging the sacred monasteries; they resist Roman troops, waving their trophies of war and lay victory to victory (...) But these villains would not have been able to do this, they would not have attained the power to do or say such godless things, if we had not first debased our dowers and defiled our purity, thus angering Christ, the giver of all things (...) We are the reason for all this.¹⁵³

In late 637 or early 638, one year after the crushing Roman defeat at Yarmuk, Sophronius surrendered a war-weary Jerusalem to the caliph ‘Umar, establishing a *modus vivendi* between

¹⁵¹ In his *Anacreontica* poems.

¹⁵² Cf. Sophronius, *Oratio in Christi Natalitia* 3205D.

¹⁵³ πόθεν γὰρ παρὲ ἡμῖν πολιτεύονται πόλεις; πόθεν βαρβαρικά πλεονάζουσιν ἔφοδοι; πόθεν Σαρακηνῶν ἡμῖν ἐπανίστανται φάλαγγες; πόθεν τοσαύτη φθορὰ καὶ ληηλασίαι πεπλήθυνται; πόθεν ἀνθρωπίνων αἱμάτων ἐκχύσεις ἄπαστοι γίνονται; πόθεν τὰ ἀνθρώπεια σώματα ἐσθίουσι τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; πόθεν ἐκκλησίαι καθήρηνται; πόθεν σταυρὸς ἐνυβρίζεται; ... Σαρακηνοὶ θεομισεῖς καὶ ἀλάστορες καὶ αὐτὸ σαφῶς τὸ τῆς ἐρημώσεως βδέλυγμα, τὸ προφητικῶς ἡμῖν προλεγόμενον, καὶ τόπους, οὓς οὐ δεῖ, διατρέχουσι καὶ πόλεις ληίζονται, ἀγροὺς ἐκθερίζουσι καὶ κόμας πυρὶ κατακαίουσι, καὶ ἐκκλησίας ἀγίας φλογίζουσι, καὶ ἱερὰ μοναστήρια στρέφουσι καὶ παρατάξουσι Ῥωμαϊκαῖς ἀντιτάττονται, καὶ πολεμοῦντες ἐγείρουσι τρόπαια καὶ νίκαις νίκαις συνάπτουσι ... ἅπερ οὐκ ἂν οἱ μισοὶ διεπράττοντο, οὔτε τοσαύτην ἰσχὺν προσεκτήσαντο, ὡς τοσαῦτα πράττειν ἀθέσμως καὶ φθέγγεσται, εἰ μὴ πρῶτοι τὸ δῶρον ἡμεῖς ἐνυβρίσαμεν καὶ τὴν κάθαρσιν ἡμεῖς ἐμίανουμεν πρῶτιστοι, καὶ ταύτη τὸν δωροδότην Χριστὸν λευπήκαμεν ... ὄντως ἡμεῖς τούτων ὅλων καθεσθήκαμεν αἴτιοι. Sophronios, *Logos eis to hagion baptisma* 166-7.

Christians and Muslims to be repeated as other citizens of Syria and Egypt chose to pay for peace from the Arabs.¹⁵⁴ Others chose to leave for lands still controlled by the Romans. But Sophronius, and the other Christians who stayed, seem to have shown a remarkable lack of interest for the religious mind of their new overlords.¹⁵⁵

Of course, Roman observers had no reason to make poetry out of the new fall of Jerusalem.¹⁵⁶ But they did not even bother to establish a historical narrative of the defeat, which had existed under the Persian wars.¹⁵⁷ Apart from the Roman garrison in Gaza, the Arab conquests – obviously not void of bloodshed – left no traces in the martyrologies, neither in nor outside the conquered areas.¹⁵⁸ Only apocalypticists made it into a core topic.¹⁵⁹ Orthodox writers after 630 are mainly concerned with the Monotheletic heresy of the emperor and takes no notice of Islam: it was the heresy of the former which was shocking, not what the desert invaders happened to believe.¹⁶⁰ The next generation of Orthodox martyrs – after the victims of the Persian war proclaimed martyrs under Heraclius¹⁶¹ – would be victims of

¹⁵⁴ Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule*, 77-84. The traditional text of ‘Umar’s treatise assures the Christians of Īliyā (Aelia Capitolina, the Latin name for Jerusalem after the Roman destruction) safety for themselves, their property, their churches and “their cross”, possibly a reference to the True cross, otherwise said to have been evacuated by the Romans. The document also promises the Christians that they will not be forcibly converted, that they will not have to live together with the Jews (!) and that no taxes will be taken from them before the harvest. (Cf. Tabari *Tārīḥ* I:2405)

¹⁵⁵ Sophronius also describes how the Arabs *utter blasphemies against Christ and the church, they are recklessly blaspheming God; in fact, these God-enemies claim to be masters of everything, as they follow their master, the Devil* but he uses the pre-islamic terms “Saracens”, “Ismaelites” and “Hagarenes” without any clear distinction.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Olster on Sophronius: “The man who surrendered Jerusalem did not offer hope in an imperial restoration that he did not have. Instead, he offered hope by disassociating the empire from the Christian community and creating a new Christian identity that was Roman no longer”. *Roman Defeat, Christian Response* 99f.

¹⁵⁷ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature* 144. By contrast, the Persians transformed *their* defeat to the Arabs into a main literary theme, which throughout the centuries has evoked popular visions about a glorious pre-Islamic past side by side with the no less strong narratives of Shi’i Islam (cf. Meisami, *Persian Historiography* 40-45).

¹⁵⁸ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 336 n1. and 351 n58. David Woods has tried to prove that Sophronius was martyred together with the Gaza troops (“The 60 Martyrs of Gaza and the Martyrdom of Bishop Sophronius of Jerusalem”), which, if it is true, must be considered as a most extraordinary lacuna in the Christian narratives as well!

¹⁵⁹ See below, 1.3.2; obviously, a society which has lost faith in itself has no need for martyrs any longer.

¹⁶⁰ Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen* 191.

¹⁶¹ Kaegi, *Heraclius* 196.

imperial persecution on a level which had been unheard of for centuries: the pope Martin and Maximus Confessor, who both refused to recognise the one-energy-doctrine of Heraclius and therefore were tried by his grandson Constans II¹⁶² and had their tongues cut.¹⁶³ Maximus Confessor did witness the increasing Arab menace in Egypt, but interpreted it similarly to how Sophronius had in Jerusalem: as a Divine retribution for the sins of the Christians and the evil of the Jews, whose conversions to Christianity he mistrusted.¹⁶⁴

Thus, while it cannot be denied that the historical reality was much more complex than the Muslim chroniclers later depicted it, one should also note that *Roman* historical narratives come to an abrupt end after 630 (whereas the local history-writing of the religious communities lives on).¹⁶⁵ At his death in 641, having returned to Constantinople, Heraclius was held in very low esteem even there (though his image in history recovered afterwards).¹⁶⁶ His wife and niece in the scandalous marriage, Martina, and his son by her, Heraklonas, were both deposed by the senate later the same year and had their noses slit; and his grandson, Constans II, having finally ousted the usurper Valentinian, moved his seat of residence to Sicily, “intending to transfer the imperial capital to Rome”¹⁶⁷ – though we know very little even about this interesting decision. A few Christian chroniclers still care about the fate of the Roman state, but their perspectives are unsure and confused.¹⁶⁸ It makes a sharp contrast to how Victor of Vita had reacted to the Vandal conquests 150 years before.

¹⁶² Stratos notes (*Byzantium in the Seventh Century* III:2-3) that Constans was officially named Constantine (as Constantine III) but became referred to with a pejorative diminutive (as Constans II) in the chronicles. I will keep the latter form of the name here, since it is generally adopted by all modern historians.

¹⁶³ Among the accusations directed against the pope was also the rumours that he had given money the Arabs. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 74-5, Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen* 184f., and, further, 1.3.2.

¹⁶⁴ *Seeing a barbaric desert people run over what belongs to others as if it belonged to them, and wild, reckless beasts, only humans in their outer appearance, destroy the society; and the Jewish people once again celebrating the spilling of human blood ... What, can I say, is a greater sore in the eye of Christians and a greater terror to their ears ...?* Maximus Confessor, *Epistolae*, PG 91:540-541.

¹⁶⁵ Whitby, “Greek Historical Writing” 66ff, Cameron, “New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature”, 89ff. Cf. Olster above (*Roman Defeat, Christian Response* 99-100), Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 427, van Ginkel, “Heraclius and the Saints” 239f.

¹⁶⁶ Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 265-268, 294-299.

¹⁶⁷ Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6153, 6160. See further ch. 1.3.1. Constans II became the last Roman emperor to visit Rome, but is mainly remembered there for having stolen the brazen roof of the Pantheon.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. the unknown Maronite Chronicler quoted below (1.1.4).

Non-Orthodox and non-Christian authors might have encountered the collapse of Roman power in a more optimistic way, regarding it as a political change that brought a new religious freedom to their own communities,¹⁶⁹ though pessimistic and apocalyptic views predominate among them as well.¹⁷⁰ But common to all authors, whether positive or negative in their attitude towards the Arabs, is that they confront the latter as an *outward* phenomenon whose inner nature and motives they know nothing about. They have vague ideas about Islam (and which Arabs could have described the new faith to them?);¹⁷¹ rumours about the existence of a religious leader among the invaders (“do prophets come armed with sword and chariot?”) are met with disbelief (“these are only the works of anarchy”), and even later observers being informed about Muhammad prefer to explain him as a product of intrigant Jews or Christian heretics,¹⁷² or demons,¹⁷³ or a godfearing man who was misunderstood by his godless people.¹⁷⁴ The final compromise has been lasting: to make the religious motives of the Arabs simply a quest for bodily pleasures.¹⁷⁵

To the author of the Syriac “Homily for the Child Martyrs of Babylon”,¹⁷⁶ the faith and religious practises of the Arabs were of no interest when he – at a quick glance, before turning to other issues – eyed their actions:

Let us not fast like the God-killing Jews, nor fast like the Arabs, who are oppressors, who give themselves up to prostitution, massacre and lead into captivity the sons of men, saying “We both fast and pray.”

¹⁶⁹ Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine* 81ff.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Lewis, “An Apocalyptic Vision”, Kaegi, “Initial Byzantine Reactions” and 1.3.2.

¹⁷¹ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origin* 62.

¹⁷² John of Damascus in *De Haeresibus* (PG 94 764-5), the *History* of Sebeos, transl. Howard-Johnson 95-7.

¹⁷³ *Alla occuber [Allāhu akbar] aduocatio demonum est*: Wolf, “The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad” 99f. Cf. also ch. 2.1.2.

¹⁷⁴ “A monk of Beth Hale and an Arab Notable”, Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 468 (cf. 537).

¹⁷⁵ The Syriac chronicler of Zuqin (cf. 2.3.2) writing in the late eighth century, described the Arabs in the following manner: *This nation is very lascivious and sensual. Every law instituted for them, be it by Muhammad or by any other God-fearing person, is despised and dismissed if it is not instituted according to their sensual pleasure. But a law which fulfils their wishes and desires, even if it is instituted by nobody of them, they accept, saying: “This has been instituted by the Prophet and Messenger of God. Moreover, it was commanded to him in this manner by God!”* *The Chronicle of Zuqin* (transl. Harrak)142.

¹⁷⁶ The title is no reference to any contemporary martyrdom, but to the three young men in the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar (*Dan. 3*), in later traditions often depicted as boys.

Robert Hoyland dated this to around the year 640, when Arab raiding and lawlessness was still abundant in the region and had not yet given place to peace treaties.¹⁷⁷

Christian Décobert has criticized the depicting of the Arab conquerors as “raiders”¹⁷⁸ but it is difficult to see how they might have been understood in a different way by people in the conquered areas, who had known and feared these Arabs as a “terror of the desert” long before Islam.¹⁷⁹ A chasm divides the early Arab Muslim from the settled non-Muslim, not only in terms of language and religious practices. Even if the Muslim warriors were no nomads or bedouins as the name Saracen might indicate,¹⁸⁰ to their neighbours they clearly were,¹⁸¹ and even if the invasion was seen as an ordered and well-organised conquest by the Muslims¹⁸² – having overcome their tribal *ǧāhiliya* – the peoples they conquered only saw “works of anarchy”¹⁸³ in it, “Barbarians overrunning a land where they do not belong”,¹⁸⁴ which they tried to tackle as best as they could, being left as they were without imperial defenders.¹⁸⁵ To see pious motives behind the behaviour of the Arabs might never have occurred to the settled peoples – it would probably even have seemed absurd to them.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁷ Hoyland – including the translation quoted here – *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 121.

¹⁷⁸ “The Arabs who invaded Byzantine Syria and Sasanid Mesopotamia were neither savage and dusty hordes of bandits greedy for booty, nor hungry gangs fleeing from poverty, nor merchants in search of new networks, but warriors first and foremost, few in number and highly disciplined” (transl. Simpson 2008 93).

¹⁷⁹ Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* 294ff. Destruction caused by Bedouin Arabs had been abundant during the Sassanian occupation as well. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* 31.

¹⁸⁰ One should note that the messenger reporting the rise of Muhammad to Heraclius in the *Arabic* version of the story (Tabari, *Tārīḥ* I:1562) is introduced to the emperor as *a man from the people of sheeps and camels* (raḡul ... min ʿahli š-šāʿi wa-l-ʿibili), which indicates that the transmitters really ascribed such a reputation to their forefathers. Also the metaphor for a Muslim conqueror (Tabari *Tārīḥ* I:2395) as a person who *makes the dogs bark and its chicken scared* (ʿanbaḥa kalābihā wa-ʿanfara daḡāḡihā) indicates that Arabs were proud of having a rough appearance. When Muʿawiya asks ʿUmar for tougher policies towards the Romans, it is precisely because he can *hear their dogs bark and their chickens squeak* (I:2820).

¹⁸¹ ἔθνος ἐρημικόν τε καὶ βάρβαρον, cf. Maximus Confessor above (n). It is perhaps unlikely that the word Saracen derives from the Arabic word *saraqā*, to steal, but the meaning is still analogous with the Arabic *badw*.

¹⁸² Cf. Donner, “Centralized Authority” 359f.

¹⁸³ ἀκαταστασίας ἔργα, cf. *Doctrina Jacobi* above.

¹⁸⁴ τόπους, οὐς οὐ δεῖ, διατρέχουσι, cf. Sophronius above.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. the so-called *Byzantine-Arabic Chronicle of 741*, which says that the Arabs conquered the neighbouring countries *by stealth rather than by open attacks* (transl. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 615).

The peace treaties between Muslims and Christians made under ‘Umar were guaranteeing the safety of the communities in Syria, Palestine and Egypt from further hostilities in exchange for taxes to the Arabs and submission to their power.¹⁸⁷ ‘Umar, or the forces he represented, must have realised the economically unwise in “works of anarchy” that would exhaust the settled peoples in the area and destroy their valuable resources.¹⁸⁸ But this does not prove the establishment of a *rival universalist monotheism* in the region – the Islam which history would come to know – quite the opposite, the non-Muslim sources confirm what is known from the later Muslim history-writers: that Islam at this stage remained a concern for the conquering elite, for which becoming a Muslim required acceptance into an Arab tribe.¹⁸⁹ Conversely, the non-Muslim picture of a conqueror who remains an *outsider* in the conquered lands is confirmed by the Muslim tradition: it says that ‘Umar returned to Hijaz, shunned the new provinces and kept a strong distance towards all non-Arabs.¹⁹⁰ It even provided his biography with a final twist that might have more than an accidental moral in it: in 644, the conqueror of Syria, Egypt and Iraq was murdered by the only non-Arab admitted to the Hijaz, a slave of Christian or Zoroastrian origin, who felt wronged by his master.¹⁹¹

The end of ‘Umar might in some sense reflect the fact that the unstoppable Arab victories in the “territories where they did not belong” in the long end had consequences for the Arabs who stayed in Hijaz and believed that the conquests would not affect *their* traditional way of life. Thirty years after the death of the Prophet, Arabic poets would lament the depopulation of his homeland to the new provinces.¹⁹² It seems that Patricia Crone and

¹⁸⁶ The question about the longing for martyrdom among the Muslims is not going to be discussed here; for the moment, it suffices to quote Goldzieher: “Der christliche Einfluss, durch welchen das Wort *shahīd* von dem ‘Zeugen, Bekenner’ auf den ‘Märtyrer’ ausgedehnt wird, kommt erst in späterer Zeit zur Geltung.” (*Muhammedanische Studien* II: 387ff). We will discuss this further in chapter 2.1.

¹⁸⁷ Shaban, *Islamic History A.D. 600-750* 39ff. In practice, a Roman taxing system now enriched the Arabs.

¹⁸⁸ The oldest scriptural evidence from the conquest is a bilingual Greek-Arabic papyrus, dated 643, in which the army commander Abdallah ibn Jabir confirms the receipt of 65 sheep from the pagarchs of Herakleopolis, Christophoros and Theodorakis. See app. to Ruprechtsberger (ed.) *Syrien: von den Aposteln zu den Kalifen* 496f.

¹⁸⁹ Wellhausen, *Das Arabische Reich und sein Sturz*, 12, 15, 18.

¹⁹⁰ Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* 14f. As Marlow points out, there seems to be a connection between early Muslim resistance towards non-Arab customs and a resistance towards non-tribal societies marked by hierarchich power structures (cf. below). On a more basic level, ‘Umar is said to have been frightened by the Mediterranean and to have considered Africa a “Gate of Hell” (see below, 1.3.1).

¹⁹¹ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* 74f.

¹⁹² Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz* 34.

Michael Cook went too far in their famous interpretation of this topic,¹⁹³ when it is more of a literary stereotype that to the *Arabs*, the coming-of-age of Islam in the World came to mean the loss of the innocence of the Desert.¹⁹⁴

1.1.4. The Arab Caesar

In AG 971 [659] Constans's 18th year, many Arabs gathered at Jerusalem and made Mu'awya king, and he went up and sat down on Golgotha; he prayed there, and went to Gethsemane and went down to the tomb of the blessed Mary to pray in it ... In July of the same year the emirs and many Arabs gathered and proffered their right hand to Mu'awya. Then an order went out that he should be proclaimed king in all the villages and cities of his dominion and that they should make acclamations and invocations to him. He also minted gold and silver, but it was not accepted, because it had no cross on it. Furthermore, Mu'awya did not wear a crown like other kings in the world. He placed his throne in Damascus and refused to go to Muhammad's throne.¹⁹⁵

There are several things to note in this well-known passus from an unknown Maronite chronicler in the 7th century, but first it might be necessary to recapitulate the events that led up to the coronation of Mu'awya, which took place in Jerusalem around the year 660.¹⁹⁶

After the conquest of Syria, 'Umar had left Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan in charge of Damascus. When the latter died from plague two years later, he was replaced as governor over the province by his younger brother Mu'awya.¹⁹⁷ They were sons of the same Abu Sufyan who, according to tradition, had met with Heraclius in Hims less than ten years earlier, and their family had old connections to Syria, as they were tradesmen from the wealthy

¹⁹³ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism* 32-4.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima* 164ff. As far as I know, nobody has investigated the relationship between the Salafi tradition on the Four first generations of Islam, and the archetype of the Four ages of Man known from both Greek and Indian mythology – including the notion of an “Arcadian bliss” allegedly preserved by “innocent” pastoralists outside the corruptions of a complex and confusing civilisation.

¹⁹⁵ *Chron. Maron.*, transl. Palmer, 31-32.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Tabari, *Tārīḥ* II 4-5, who places it in 660-1, to the quoted Maronite chronicler, who places it in 659.

¹⁹⁷ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* 60.

Qurayshite clan of ‘Abd Shams¹⁹⁸ with at least one estate of their own in the agricultural areas.¹⁹⁹ When ‘Umar was murdered, the council of Medina gave the command over the Muslims to ‘Uthman, a cousin of Mu‘awiyah who had been twice son-in-law of the Prophet.²⁰⁰ Thereby, the Caliphate was effectively in the hands of the Umayyad family.²⁰¹

Muslim chroniclers have always had a complicated attitude to the first ruling dynasty of Islam,²⁰² during whose reign the Islamic empire reached its greatest extension but experienced the first severe divisions of the Muslim community.²⁰³ ‘Umar had been murdered by a non-Arab, but when ‘Uthman was murdered in 656, it was by fellow Arabs who felt disappointed with his tendency to enrich his own family by the incomes from the new provinces.²⁰⁴ The murder resulted in the first Islamic civil war (*fitna*) as Muhammad’s nephew ‘Ali claimed the Caliphate for himself in Iraq, and Mu‘awiyah – swearing to revenge the murder of his cousin – declined to submit Syria and Damascus. The old Muslim elite in Mecca, centered around Muhammad’s widow ‘Aisha, struggled to keep up with the new influence of the non-Arab provinces, but finally lost their power to ‘Ali in the so-called “battle of the camel”.²⁰⁵ ‘Ali made a truce with Mu‘awiyah after the battle of Siffin, but was murdered in 661 by the *Hawāriğ*, a group of fervent believers who refused to recognise any worldly authority. Since there was no one left to oppose him,²⁰⁶ Mu‘awiyah won the Caliphate for himself practically by draw and could unite all Arab dominions under Damascus.

¹⁹⁸ Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* 92, 115.

¹⁹⁹ Kennedy, “The Impact of Muslim Rule on the Pattern of Rural Settlement in Syria” 291.

²⁰⁰ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* 79. ‘Uthman is traditionally identified as the caliph who compiled the Qur’an in the form we know it today.

²⁰¹ Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz* 26.

²⁰² As Goldzieher noted, “dass ergebene Dichter die von den Pietisten als Feinde des Islam verpönten Umejjaden und deren Helfer in ebendemselben Sinne (...) als Vertreter und Schützer der Sache des Islam verherrlichen.” *Muhammedanische Studien* II:381.

²⁰³ For traditions on the early Caliphs, and especially the ambivalence towards ‘Uthman, see Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origin* 190-5.

²⁰⁴ Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz* 31-2. Traditionally, ‘Uthman is remembered as “the opened door” since his murder meant that Muslims had begun killing Muslims.

²⁰⁵ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, 168-175 for a full description. It was so called since ‘Aisha took part from the back of a camel, and the battle did not end until she was carried off by ‘Ali’s men.

²⁰⁶ The main counter-candidate was ‘Ali’s oldest son Hasan, but being a peaceful man, he gave up his claims to Mu‘awiyah. Some Sunni historians list him as their fifth caliph. Shi’is, who rever Hasan as their second Imam, claim that he was poisoned on Mu‘awiyah’s instigation. Momen, *Shi’i Islam* 26-8.

The sudden change of events that brought Mu‘awiyā to power had immense consequences for the former Roman territories. Before, they had been provinces in the Mediterranean empire, first captured by the Persians and then ravaged by the Arabs; now they became the heartland of a new empire, whose sphere of influence stretched across the territories of all the former masters.²⁰⁷ From Syria, Mu‘awiyā and his successors subdued the remnants of Sassanid Iran, kept the Arabic tribes under control, while outwitting the Roman efforts to win back the Levant, both by land and by sea. Their achievements are perhaps best proven by the fact that the ‘Umayyads became remembered as bitter enemies by the Byzantines,²⁰⁸ depraved tyrants by the Arabs,²⁰⁹ and both by the Persians.²¹⁰ But we do get some less biased information from sources dating from the ‘Umayyad establishment of power.²¹¹ Especially striking is the praise which non-Muslim authors have bestowed upon the first of them. To the Nestorian monk John bar Penkaye in Mesopotamia – who, like most non-Arab observers, considers the Arab reign as a “Barbarian kingdom” foreboding the end of the world –²¹² the reign of Mu‘awiyā was an era when “justice flourished” and “there was great peace in the regions under his control; he let everyone live as they wanted”; the only thing the author particularly condemns is that there was made no distinction anymore between Jews, Christians and “Pagans”.²¹³ Mu‘awiyā’s son Yazid, who is seen as a veritable devil in later Shi’i history and a corrupt ruler by many Sunnis, is remembered in the Latin “Byzantine-Arabic Chronicle of 741” as “a pleasant man ... deemed highly agreeable by all the peoples subject to his rule. He never, as is the wont of men, sought glory for himself because of his royal rank, but lived as a citizen along with all the common people.”²¹⁴ Even his young son

²⁰⁷ Walmsley, “Production, Exchange and Regional Trade in the Islamic East Mediterranean” 265.

²⁰⁸ See further discussions on the Byzantine-Arab wars in ch. 1.3.

²⁰⁹ One of the most famous Arabic examples of anti-‘Umayyad history-writing, though late, is the *Kitāb an-nizā‘a wa-t-tahāṣum fī-mā bayna Banī ‘Umayya wa-banī Hāšim* by the 14th century Egyptian scholar al-Maqrizi. As Crone and Hinds emphasised in *God’s Caliph*, this is not merely a matter of Abbasid counter-propaganda.

²¹⁰ Most notably, in Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāme*, the evil man-eating Arab king Zahhak, who oppresses Iran for a thousand years, has certain historical characteristics in common with the Umayyads.

²¹¹ The Armenian *History* of Sebeos ends in a present tense: ... *Muawiya prevailed and conquered. Having brought them into submission to himself, he rules over the possessions of the sons of Ismael and makes peace with all.* Transl. Howard-Johnson, 154.

²¹² Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser” 84-94. Cf below, 1.3.2.

²¹³ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 196. Note that for John, Heraclius was a sinner due to his concessions to Monophysitism, whereas the Monophysites accused the Orthodox for “Nestorianism”.

²¹⁴ Hoyland’s translation; *ibid.*, 620.

Mu'awiyah II is praised in an almost saintly manner with no mention of the dissent among the Arabs under his short rule: "he, before remaining in power half a year, departed from this light."²¹⁵ This is not said to imply that there was great rejoicing among the non-Muslims at the Muslim rule, but to emphasise the differences between some contemporary views towards much of the later legacy of the era.

Whereas there might have been different reasons for the peace and prosperity experienced under Sufyanid rule in Syria,²¹⁶ it is clear that the new rulers did care about their appeal, not only among their fellow tribesmen or *mawla* (clients).²¹⁷ In 662, a Greek inscription in the bathhouse of Gadara, lake Tiberias, thanks "Abdalla Mauia amir almoumenin" (Mu'awiyah, the Muslim Commander of the Believers) for having repaired the caldarium.²¹⁸ Theophanes reports that when the great cathedral of Edessa was destroyed by the 677 earthquake, Mu'awiyah had it rebuilt.²¹⁹ The Latin pilgrim Arculf who visited Jerusalem around 680 approvingly described Damascus as a "royal capital" and Mu'awiyah as the "king of the Arabs" acting as an impartial judge between the city's Jews and Christians²²⁰ and a similar report from the Maronite chronicle makes the caliph judge in a case between Monophysites and Orthodox, the Orthodox being favoured.²²¹ Not only non-Arabs were cared for like this, as is known from the inscriptions on the dam in Ta'if, even if later Abbasid propaganda erased inscriptions to the 'Umayyads and scorned their efforts.²²²

²¹⁵ Ibid. Cf. p317 for a similar Jewish perspective.

²¹⁶ Not at least, of course, due to the fact that Syria now had become the receiver from the ongoing Arabic expansion. Theophanes recalls that when the Arabs started conquering Sicily, the captives asked to be settled in Damascus, and that 5000 Slavs asked for settlements in Syria the year after. But when there was famine in Syria in the 680's, *many people moved to Roman lands (Chronographia AM 6155, 6156, 6179).*

²¹⁷ "Client" was the earliest juridical status for a non-Arab who wanted to attain at least semi-Muslim status, the first step towards a Muslim "citizenship". Crone, *Slaves on Horses* 49ff.

²¹⁸ Gatiet, "Les inscriptions grecques d'époque islamique" 149.

²¹⁹ Theophanes *Chronographia* AM 6170.

²²⁰ *Damascus ciuitas regalis magna ... in qua Saracinarum rex adeptus eius principatum regnat.* See further Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen* 35.

²²¹ *Chron. Maron.* 30.

²²² Miles, "Early Islamic Inscriptions Near Ta'if in the Hijaz" 236f. The Arabic text means: *This is the dam of God's servant Mu'awiya, Commander of the Believers. It was built by God's servant, the son of Sakhr with the help of God, in the year fifty-eight [677-8]. May God forgive His servant Mu'awiya, Commander of the Believers, affirm him, help him and make him prosper.*

Later Islamic tradition caught the characteristic difference between the idealist ‘Umar and the realist Mu‘awiyia in the following often-related scenario,²²³ taking place when the latter was still governor in Damascus:

‘Umar ibn al-Khattab left for Syria and saw Mu‘awiyia approaching him in a cortege. When he met with the retinue, ‘Umar said: “Oh Mu‘awiyia! You are approaching with a cortege and you are leaving likewise; and it has come to my ears that you hold *levee* in your mansion and that there are clients at your door.” [Mu‘awiyia] answered: “Commander of the Believers! Our Enemies are present everywhere and they have got eyes and spies; I want them, Commander of the Believers, to see that there is power in Islam.” ‘Umar said: “This is either the smartness of a cunning man or the deceit of a dubious one.” Mu‘awiyia replied: “Rehearse me, Commander of the Believers, in your will, and I will hearken to it.” [Umar] said: “Woe you! Whatever I discuss in concerns where I want to reproach you, you leave me not knowing if I should order you or forbid you to do it.”²²⁴

The Maronite Chronicler who described the coronation of Mu‘awiyia still shows faith in the righteousness of the old Roman rule; the event takes place “in the 18th year of emperor Constans”, and its apparent calm is overshadowed by several earthquakes, indicating Divine anger. But the fact that he noticed the event at all shows that Mu‘awiyia had succeeded with something ‘Umar never did: he had opened the eyes of the non-Muslims for Muslim rule. The new caliph clearly did not feel confident with a declaration of loyalty from his fellow Arabs, as had ‘Uthman, or making a religious statement to the Muslims by leading the prayer on the Temple mount, as had ‘Umar: he wandered in the footsteps of Jesus in Jerusalem, *as had*

²²³ The problematic nature of Islamic historical traditions such as these can be exemplified by the fact that a similar scenario will get an almost reverse sensmorale by swapping the contrahents: cf. Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism* 34-6.

²²⁴ ḥaraġa ‘Umaru bnu-l-Ḥaṭṭābi ‘ilā aš-Šāmi fa-ra’yā Mu‘āwiyata fī mawkibin yatalaqqāhu wa-rāḥa ‘ilayhi fī mawkibin fa-qāla lahū ‘Umaru yā Mu‘āwiyatu turawḥu fī mawkibi wa-ṭaġadū fī miṭliḥi wa-balaġanī ‘innaka tuṣābiḥu fī manzilika wa-ḍawū l-ḥāġāti bi-bābika qāla yā ‘amīra l-mu‘minīna ‘inna l-‘adūwa biḥā qarībun minnā wa-la-hum ‘uyūnun wa-ġawāsīsu fa-‘ardatu yā ‘amīra al-mu‘minīna ‘inna yurā li-l-Islāmi ‘izzan fa-qāla lahū ‘Umaru ‘inna hādā li-kaydi raġulin labībīn ‘aw ḥud‘ati raġulin ‘irayibīn fa-qāla Mu‘awiyatu yā ‘amīra l-mu‘minīna murnī bi-mā šī‘ta ‘ašīru ‘ilayhi qāla wayḥaka mā nāzartuka fī ‘amrin ‘ayyibu ‘ilayka fihā ‘illā taraktanī mā ‘adrī āmurukam ‘anhāka, Tabari, *Tārīḥ* II:207.

Heraclius done thirty years before. Just like that time, it was hardly an act of “Christian” conviction but a strong manifestation of centralised rule. Our Maronite does not say exactly how the caliph went from Golgotha (the Church of the Holy Sepulchre) to Gethsemane (the Tomb of Mary), but since the Golden Gate would have marked a now disappeared road between the two places, it is tempting to assume that he passed through it on his way out from the city, if the chronology is correct.²²⁵ Neither was it an act of mere imitation: from the Maronite we also learn that Mu‘awiyā minted coins without crosses, that he did not wear a crown, and that he “refused to go to the throne of Muhammad”. All this indicates important breaks with the past: with Christian symbols, with Imperial insignias, as well as with the Hijazi Arab origins of Islam. Mu‘awiyā represented a synthesis of Heraclius and ‘Umar, and yet a break with both of them.

The unknown Maronite in Jerusalem, the unknown Syrian sources for Theophanes’ “Chronographia” in Constantinople and the “Byzantine-Arab chronicle of 741”, the Latin pilgrim Arculf in Rome, Sebeos in Armenia and John bar Penkaye in the Jazira are all independent sources which seem to have perceived and understood the meaning of this new political framework. Some scholars have even laid emphasis upon diplomatic documents²²⁶ letting Constans II acknowledge Mu‘awiyā’s status in Syria;²²⁷ something that would fit extremely well with traditional Islamic descriptions of the Umayyads as bad or corrupt Muslims.²²⁸ But one should not go too far with the implications of such a title; what is important to note is that, from the time of Mu‘awiyā, there seems to have existed a political understatement between Romans and Muslims.

As we already noted above, there is a gap in Byzantine narratives after the triumph of Heraclius, the establishment of Arabic power in the Near east being overshadowed by the Monothelete controversy. In Mu‘awiyā’s reign, Constans II had resided on Sicily, where he was murdered in 668; but we have few clues to the reasons for these actions. In face of the ‘Umayyad expansion over Asia, the disintegration of Roman power in the Balkans as well as the rebellion of Olympios in Italy and Africa, the change of residence might be seen as a sensible strategy for keeping control over a united Mediterranean – but it might as well be

²²⁵ Of course, since he was declared caliph in the city, he could not *enter* Jerusalem, but had to do the triumph backwards – if it has any significance at all.

²²⁶ Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus* 19f, 25ff.

²²⁷ Cf. Popp, “Die frühe Islamgeschichte nach inschriftlichen und numismatischen Zeugnissen” 45ff.

²²⁸ On this theme, Maqrizi even quotes a tradition saying that Abu Sufyan *encouraged* the Roman troops at the battlefield of Yarmuk, and was saddened when they lost the battle: *Kitāb an-nizā‘a wa-l-taḥāṣum* 54.

seen as a sign of desperation, the Roman emperor turning his back from the interiors. Theophanes reports that he did it out of “fear of the people”, and that he sent for his wife and sons to come to Sicily too, but that the latter were held in Constantinople either by the court or by the city population.²²⁹ One feels almost inclined to interpret this as if the children were kept as a kind of hostages for the safety of the city – which had at the time begun to be seriously threatened by the Bulgars.²³⁰ The oldest of the sons, the later Constantine IV, would defend Constantinople both diplomatically²³¹ and military²³² when growing up, finally making it *the* lasting imperial capital – but then one should consider that there were few urban centers left outside the areas now controlled by the ‘Umayyads.²³³

As for the conquered territories, what we might say with some certainty is that, under the early ‘Umayyads, “post-Roman” and “pre-Islamic” narratives converge long enough to leave traces in the written sources. Many of the quoted authors probably belonged to the last generation still to have active memories of Roman rule in the region. Conversely, it was at this point when the first Islamic narratives started to emerge.²³⁴

1.1.5. Summary

When Theophanes, the main Byzantine chronicler of the next era, “finds it necessary” to tell the story of Muhammad amidst the Arabic conquests, he ends his well-informed description of the life and sayings of the prophet with the words “this heresy prevailed in the region of

²²⁹ *Chronographia* AM 6153, 6160. Theophanes says that he was hated by the people because of his Monotheletism and his treatment of the pope and Maximos Confessor. When Stratos tries to defend him, it is precisely on the grounds that the latter two had incited the population of North Africa against him (*Byzantium in the Sixth Century* III:58ff, 120f).

²³⁰ Stratos, *Byzantium in the Sixth Century* IV:102passim.

²³¹ On the 666-7 plot of the strategos Saborios to join the ‘Umayyads and rebel against the emperor, see Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus* 51-75.

²³² The reports on the first ‘Umayyad efforts to take Constantinople under Mu‘awiya in the 670’s are problematic, both chronologically and practically. Cf. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* IV:32ff. See further on this subject in ch. 1.3.

²³³ Obviously Constans II found Rome too poor and weak, and opted for Syracuse. Ephesus and the formerly so flourishing cities of the Anatolian coast had suffered considerably already under the Persian onslaught.

²³⁴ Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origin* 276-80.

Ethribos” (Yathrib), “first secretly, then by war”.²³⁵ It could be the description of any Late Antique heresy. But the riddle which Theophanes and any his Byzantine colleagues never manages to really answer is how this “heresy” suddenly made it to the ruling position of half the Roman world. The Arabic *Futūḥ* chroniclers, of course, will have a perfect answer to that question; but if there is something we actually can learn from the non-Muslim eyewitnesses to the rise of Islam, it is that the military victories of the *Rašidūn* caliphs do not explain much more than a military takeover of the Near east by an Arab warrior elite.²³⁶ How Islamic universalism outwitted Roman in the long run is not discussed²³⁷ – either because it was a theme which did not interest the chroniclers, or because they lacked an universalist outlook.

What the Arabic and Islamic history writers fail to explain is why they themselves are suddenly writing the history of a universal empire; what the Greek and Byzantine history writers fail to explain is how they suddenly stop writing the same history. They can tell us how things happened within their own epistemological frameworks, but they cannot tell us how the frameworks themselves emerged and disappeared. Only the first twenty years of ‘Umayyad rule in Syria, as doubly mirrored in the Muslim and non-Muslim sources, seem to give a glimpse into this transition, making Mu‘awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan a convincing candidate for the “missing link” between the emperor and the prophet. He might have met resistance among the more egalitarian or traditional elements of the old Arab society,²³⁸ but it at least seems that he – and not ‘Umar – “won the peace” in the conquered territories and among their inhabitants by adopting *their* language for expressing Islamic power.

²³⁵ *Chronographia* AM 6122.

²³⁶ Hoyland has temptingly suggested that such a takeover might have been propelled by a wish to obtain the power formerly held by the Ghassanids: cf. *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 558f.

²³⁷ The perhaps most obvious aspect of this is the general lack of conversion stories in Islamic historiography; cf. Bulliet, “Conversion Stories in Early Islam” 125.

²³⁸ Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism* loc. cit.

1.2. Submission

By my life [Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah said], not one person believing in God and the Last day could find an equal or the likeness to the Messenger of God among any of us. But he [Husayn ibn ‘Ali] made a fault of reason since he did not heed these words: “Say: You, our God, are the King of Kings; You give the kingdom to whomever You like and You take the kingdom from whomever it might be as it pleases You; You elevates whomever You like and You debases whomever it pleases You. Everything lies in Your hands; You are the master of all things.”²³⁹

It has been suggested that the ‘Umayyads made political *Islām* – submission – a legitimising element of their power.²⁴⁰ The word *islām* is the substantive of the fourth stem form *islama* (submit oneself, resign, surrender) of the verb *salama* (to be in peace, to be safe). Since the fourth stem form is causative, it has a practical implication as well as a spiritual: *‘aslama taslim* (submit, and you will be in peace). The *Muslim* (the one who surrenders) is thus not just a *Mu‘min* (believer)²⁴¹ but someone submitting *by action* in order to achieve peace.²⁴²

The spread of Muslims outside the Arabic peninsula had caused problems for the *‘umma*. The first *fitna* (656-660) was related to the establishment of rivalling centers of power in Syria and Iraq, regions that had been torn apart before and now destroyed the unity of the conquerors.²⁴³ The word *fitna* comes from the verb *fatana* which means “turn away”, “be seduced”, indicating a spiritual affliction as well as a practical one.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ (fa-)li-‘amrī mā ‘aḥadun yu‘imun bi-llāhi wa-yawmi l-aḥiri yarā r-rasūlu llāhi finā ‘adalan wa-lā niddan wa-la-lannahu ‘innamā ‘atā min qibali fiqihī wa-lam yaqra‘ qul Allāhumma mālika l-mulki tuwatī l-mulka man tašā‘u wa-tanzir‘u al-mulka mimman tašā‘u wa-ta‘izu man tašā‘u wa-tuḍilu man tašā‘u bi-yadika l-ḥayru ‘innaka ‘alā kulli šay‘in qadīrun. Tabari *Tāriḥ* II:380-381; the quotation from the Qur’an is from 3:25.

²⁴⁰ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism* 19-20; cf. Sharon, “The Birth of Islam in the Holy Land”.

²⁴¹ This word actually derives from a causative as well, of the verb *amuna*, which means “to be safe”.

²⁴² Cf. Q 49:14: *The Arabs say: “We believe!” Say: “You do not believe; but say ‘We submit ourselves!’; Faith has not entered your hearts, but when you hearken to God and his messenger, He will repay the least of your acts.”* The “Constitution of Medina” which had set the legal bounds for Muhammad’s community in the Hijaz, encompassed both Jews and Muslims, and thus was not a theological statement as much as a treatise on the political peace and unity of the monotheists (cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 554).

²⁴³ Momen, *Shi‘i Islam* 66. Besides, the Arabs contributed with their pre-islamic tribal quarrels, which they took with them into the conquered territories as far as to Spain (Bosquet, “Quelques remarques critiques” 24).

For the non-Muslims living in the conquered regions, this was a well-known problem.²⁴⁵ To the Orthodox Christians, political submission to the Roman emperor had fulfilled the spiritual submission to God, as the emperor defended the universal unity of the church. We have already mentioned how Mu‘awiyah slipped into the role of the emperor, and later Sunni historians like Tabari – quoted above – would make his son Yazid I justify his power with a quotation from the Qur’an, similar to the words of Jesus on Roman tax-paying in the Gospels.²⁴⁶ The most fervent supporters of this system – the Iraqi governor al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf being the most well-known – made *Islam* not only call for submission to God, but to the caliph who guarded the unity of the ‘*ummah*.²⁴⁷

Thus it seems to exist a certain affinity between the ‘Umayyad concept of *Islām* and the *Pax Romana*.²⁴⁸ This is of course not the whole truth about Islam, no more than Orthodoxy constitutes the whole truth about Christianity: otherwise the Shi’i world would not re-enact the brutal slaughter of Husayn at Karbalah each year,²⁴⁹ and even the Sunni legacy of the ‘Umayyads would perhaps have been quite different. However, from the time when these *topoi* were emerging, we are also able to follow the propagandistic language of the ‘Umayyads in the monuments they left for posterity.

1.2.1. A Roman Ka’ba?

One day, I said to my uncle: O uncle! Might [the Caliph] al-Walid not have done something better for the money of the Muslims than to spend them on the mosque in Damascus? If he had used them on road hospices or beneficial institutions, or for strengthening our fortifications, would that not have been more appropriate? And he answered: Do not say so, my son: al-Walid did what was right and his

²⁴⁴ Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and Jihad” 77f.

²⁴⁵ Theophanes describes the dissension among the Arabs with the verb *ταράσσω*, meaning “be shaken, troubled”.

²⁴⁶ Ibn Khaldun, on his part, dryly remarks that the appointment of Yazid as Caliph was inevitable, since the desert Arabs in those days would have accepted no one else (*Muqaddima* 268.)

²⁴⁷ Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* 72, Crone, Hinds, *God’s Caliph* 24-42.

²⁴⁸ After all, the *Pax* worshipped by Augustus was etymologically also a *pactus*, a treaty.

²⁴⁹ Still, an “inverted” aspect of political *Islam* is mirrored in the Shi’i concept of *taqiyya*, which legalises the concealment of one’s true religion in face of a political threat (cf. Mo’men, *Shi’i Islam* 183).

proved to be a good work. He had seen Syria being a land of Christians and he saw that they had beautiful churches with bedazzling decorations whose reputation was widespread, as the Qumama [Church of the Holy Sepulchre] or the churches of Lydda and Ruha, so he decided to give the Muslims a mosque that would detract their attention (from these churches), by creating one of the Wonders of the world. Can you not see how ‘Abd al-Malik, since he had seen the mighty dome of the Holy Sepulchre and its beauty, feared that it would take possession over the hearts of the Muslims and thus erected the dome over the Temple rock?²⁵⁰

That the Arab conquerors had changed their horses for a kingdom²⁵¹ must have been evident when Mu‘awya appointed his son Yazid successor in Damascus, introducing paternal heritage in the Caliphate.²⁵² The decision was not uncontested, and at Mu‘awya’s death in 680 opposition was raised from two areas: Iraq, where ‘Alis son Husayn was killed with his last followers on the battle-field of Karbalah by Yazid’s troops,²⁵³ and the Hijaz, where a nephew of ‘Aisha, Abdallah ibn az-Zubayr, tried to claim the hegemony of Mecca for the last time, resulting in Yazid’s troops attacking the Ka’ba with catapults in 683.²⁵⁴ With these godless acts on his conscience, Yazid suddenly died and was succeeded by his son, Mu‘awya II, who however, being a minor,²⁵⁵ abdicated, leaving the field to ibn az-Zubayr for a while. But in Damascus, another cousin of ‘Uthman, Marwan, emerged as protector of Mu‘awya II: s younger brother Khalid, marrying the widow of Yazid and claiming the title of Caliph in

²⁵⁰ Qultu yawman li-°ammī yā °amma lam yaḥṣani l-Walīdu ḥaytu °anfaqa amwāla l-muslimīna °ala ḡāmi°i Dimašqa walū °ašrafa ḡālika fī °imārati l-ṭariqi wa-l-mušāni°i wa-ramma l-ḥuṣūn la-kāna °ašwaba wa-afḡala qāla lā taf°al yā-bunayya °inna l-Walīda wafaqa wa-kašafa laḥā °an °amrin ḡalīlin wa-ḡālika °innahū ra°ā aš-Šāma balada n-Našārā wa-ra°ā lihum fihā bay°an ḥasanan qad °aftana zaḡārafahā wa-intašāira ḡikruhā ka-l-Qumāma wa-bay°ata Ludda wa-r-Ruhā fa-ttaḡada l-Muslimīna masḡidan °ašḡalahum bihi °an-hunna wa-ḡa°alahū °aḡada °aḡā°ibi d-dunyā °alā turayu °inna °Abda l-maliki lammā ra°ā °aḡimata qubbatī l-Qumāma wa-hay°ataḥ ḡašā °in ta°zama fī qulubi l-Muslimīna fa-našaba °ilā ṣ-ṣaḡra qubbatan? al-Muḡaddasi, *Aḡsan al-Taḡāsim* III:159. The traveller – who was of Syrian origin – refers to himself. If this dialogue took place in his youth, it might be dated to c. 960.

²⁵¹ Crone, *Slaves on Horses* 29-33.

²⁵² Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* 236.

²⁵³ Momen, *Shi’i Islam* 30-33.

²⁵⁴ Tabari, *Tārīḡ* II:427.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 432: according to this report, he was only 12 years old when his father died.

684.²⁵⁶ It does not seem to have been a popular move in the family, as the new queen soon smothered him with a pillow.²⁵⁷ However, it brought his own son ‘Abd al-Malik to the throne, and with him, ‘Umayyad power was strengthened. He ousted the Shi’i leader Mukthar, made peace with Constantinople, and the Christian Arab Mardaites, who had harrassed Syria on behalf of the emperor, were settled elsewhere.²⁵⁸ His reign would last for twenty years, as long as that of Mu‘awiyah, and his ten sons would provide ‘Umayyad Syria with caliphs almost to the very end. He is a central figure in the development of Islamic art as well, for it was during his reign that the first lasting monument of Islam was erected: the Dome of the Rock.

There is no reason to doubt the traditional report that the first mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem – the first al-Aqsa mosque – had been erected at the conquest or at least soon after the conquest by ‘Umar.²⁵⁹ The importance of this area to the early Muslims is confirmed from non-Muslim sources, possibly making it the *first actual* point of religious controversy between Arabs and Romans.²⁶⁰ It is likely that many Orthodox Christians felt scandalised by its location, since building activities related to this site were brought in connection with the prophecy of Jesus on the destruction of the Jewish temple and its fulfilment by the Romans,²⁶¹ a story which was by no means unknown to the Muslims.²⁶² After the revolt of Bar Kokhba in 135, Hadrian had erected a temple to Jupiter there, which was abandoned by the time of Constantine and Helen.²⁶³ The Neo-pagan emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363) later tried to refute Jesus by rebuilding the Jewish temple on its northern

²⁵⁶ Tabari, *Tārīḫ* II:577.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. For some reason, Madelung (*The Succession to Muhammad* 351ff) is gloating over this murder, fancying at length on how she sat on his face until he expired.

²⁵⁸ Theophanes *Chronographia* AM 6178, who calls it an unwise decision.

²⁵⁹ Cf. the introductory quotation to 1.1.3., from Tabari’s description of ‘Umar entering the Temple mount together with the Yemenite Rabbi Ka’b, who also relates the story about the misfortunes of the temple under the Persians. (The al-Aqsa mosque should not be confused with the 12th century “Mosque of ‘Umar” beyond the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which marks the place where ‘Umar prayed after having visited the church.)

²⁶⁰ The Georgian version of *The Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschos (d. 634) has a later additional report on a Christian marble layer in Jerusalem who helps in building the new *midzghita* on the Temple mount, falls down from a ladder and dies (as a Divine punishment). For a full text with translation, see Flusin, “L’esplanade du Temple á l’arrivée des Arabes”, 17-31.

²⁶¹ *Matth.* 24:1ff, *Mark* 13:1ff, and – especially – *Luke* 21:5ff.

²⁶² Q 17:7. Since Ottoman times, this (and other) verses adorn part of the cupola of the Dome of the Rock. Cf. also the article by Bashear, “Qur’an 2:114 and Jerusalem” 215-238.

²⁶³ Mango, “The Temple Mount AD 614-638” 2-3. It could have been incorporated in the first al-Aqsa mosque.

side, but was prevented by divine “balls of fire”.²⁶⁴ This time, no such events were reported,²⁶⁵ but in Byzantine consciousness, ‘Umar’s mosque on the Temple mountain became remembered as the “abomination of desolation”²⁶⁶ of the “godless Saracens.”²⁶⁷

The controversy seems to have been caused by its location on the Temple Mount rather than from its being a mosque, since the latter concept was still largely unknown to the non-Muslims.²⁶⁸ Arabs often chose to pray together with the Christians of the conquered areas, the most famous example being the church of St. John in Damascus.²⁶⁹ Arculf described the Islamic sermon there in Christian terms, which might give rise to suspicion about the actual identity of the Muslims.²⁷⁰ But the al-Aqsa mosque is the most clear proof we have of the Abrahamic origin of Islam: by building a place for prayer there, the Arabs manifested a return of Divine presence from mount Sion to mount Moriah which must have seemed provocative from a Roman standpoint.²⁷¹ Arculf described the building as a “rectangular prayer-house built by wooden beams”, being big enough for “3000 people”.²⁷²

The reasons for the holiness of the Temple Mount are manifold, but the most interesting question is how its status was affected by the challenges of the *fitnas*. After the 683

²⁶⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Historia* XXIII:I:3.

²⁶⁵ Theophanes reports, however, (*Chronographia* AM 6134) that the building initially was collapsing all the time, until a group of Jews told ‘Umar that it was because of the Cross on the church on the Mount of Olives. ‘Umar removed the cross from the church, and then the building remained standing.

²⁶⁶ Theophanes *Chronographia* AM 6127. This might seem like a contradiction since the words from Daniel 11:31 are – according to Mark and Matthew – quoted by Christ in the aforementioned prophecy on the destruction of Jerusalem. However, what is described as events belonging to the destruction of the temple by Luke (who does not quote Daniel) is there more generally connected to the signs before the end of the world.

²⁶⁷ Photius, *Amphilochia* 316. Cf. 3.2.5.

²⁶⁸ Theophanes here uses the totally unique Greek word προσκυνητήριον – kneeling-place – which is a direct translation of the word *masjid* (via his Syrian source, of course; but the translation is nonetheless interesting).

²⁶⁹ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 7, 44*passim*, and below, 1.2.2.

²⁷⁰ Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen* 42, who suggests that insofar Arculf was unaware of the cultural discrepancy, “muß der Ablauf des Gottesdienstes ... sehr an ihm vertraute Meßfeiern erinnern, adān an Vormesse, erste und zweite ħuṭba an Schriftlesung und Predigt, der du^cā³ li l-mu³minin an das Kirchengebet und die salat an die eigentliche Messe”.

²⁷¹ The traditional reports (cf. Tabari *Tārīḥ* I:2409) on ‘Umar entering the Temple mountain with the Yemenite Jew Ka’b might of course cause speculation on Jewish sympathies of early Muslims – but why, then, did they prefer to pray in churches rather than synagogues?

²⁷² ... *quadrangulum orationis domum, quam subrectis tabulis ... super quasdam ruinarum reliquias construentes*, Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen* 38f.

damage, ibn az-Zubayr had razed the Ka'ba in Mecca to the ground in order to rebuild it, it is said, as he believed it to have looked in the days of Abraham.²⁷³ This meant he provided the cubic building with a semicircular apse in the north,²⁷⁴ pointing towards Jerusalem,²⁷⁵ and decorated it with mosaics taken from a church in Yemen.²⁷⁶ These are strange facts²⁷⁷ considering that Ibn az-Zubayr represented the community in Mecca, which would be most likely to feel sceptic towards such “foreign” customs.²⁷⁸ Perhaps it indicates that the cultural borders had become confused.²⁷⁹ After the bombardement of Mecca in 683, ibn az-Zubayr might have feared that divine sympathies had moved to Jerusalem, and that the Ka'ba in its old form had been “too Pagan”. With the rebuilding, the tomb of Ishmael²⁸⁰ was incorporated with the Ka'ba, and the Black stone was placed in a special casket inside the building.²⁸¹

For all his precautions, ibn az-Zubayr failed: ‘Abd al-Malik soon subjugated the whole Muslim world like Mu‘awyaia had before him. But at the time²⁸² of the decisive battle in 692, at which ibn az-Zubayr was killed, ‘Abd al-Malik had done something else in Jerusalem: he built an octogonal building over the Temple rock,²⁸³ reportedly to distract the pilgrims from Mecca to Jerusalem.²⁸⁴ This building was centralised, allowing circumambulation of the kind

²⁷³ Cf. Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ* 1506-8.

²⁷⁴ The foundations of this apse are known as the *ḥaṭīm* (border) and are still visible today.

²⁷⁵ Günter Lüling seems to have taken this argument much further in a small monography by name *Der christliche Kult an der vorislamischen Kaaba als Problem der Islamwissenschaft und christlichen Theologie* (1992) which I have not been able to retrieve. Even if Ibn az-Zubayr’s rebuilding might have had historical reasons, it was certainly not uncontroversial: cf. below.

²⁷⁶ Mas’udi, *Murūğ ad-dahab wa-ma‘ādan al-ğawhar* V:192.

²⁷⁷ al-Muqaddasi later would refer to a tradition which confused the chronology of events, having the ‘Umayyads deliberately destroying the *ḥaṭīm* apse because of its heretic implications. *Ahsan al-Taqaṣim* 74-5.

²⁷⁸ Sharon, “The Birth of Islam in the Holy Land”.

²⁷⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, Kister, “Sanctity Joint and Divided” 18-65, and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 560ff for a discussion on these matters.

²⁸⁰ Which is in the *ḥaṭīm* area. See *EF²* (Ka’ba) for a full discussion on the matter.

²⁸¹ Tabari, *Tārīḥ* II:537.

²⁸² Blair argues for the years 692-702, cf. “What is the date of the Dome of the Rock?” 68f.

²⁸³ It is not clear why ‘Umar did not erect the al-Aqsa mosque directly on the spot of the Rock. The traditions quoted by Tabari might indicate that he preferred a location to the south, where there could be no doubt that he was praying towards Mecca. Besides, a veneration of the Rock itself could have been controversial since stones were often used as objects of veneration by the Pagan Arabs – a fact which, according to tradition, made ‘Umar first feel reluctant to venerate the Black Stone in the Ka’ba as well (cf. Numani, ‘*Umar* 128).

²⁸⁴ Ya’qubi, *Tārīḥ* II:311.

known from the Ka'ba, while adopting the form of Late antiquity sanctuaries like the Tomb of Mary in Gethsemane,²⁸⁵ or the Kathisma Church between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.²⁸⁶ The scenario is strange: while az-Zubayr tries to rebuild the old Pagan temple in a more Abrahamitic way,²⁸⁷ 'Abd al-Malik builds a Roman Ka'ba over the Jewish temple rock.²⁸⁸ The Dome of the Rock is no mosque;²⁸⁹ just like the Ka'ba, it is a sanctuary, centered around a stone, representing the place of the All-holiest of the Jewish temple, which had been empty, symbolising victory over Pagan idols, just like the Ka'ba after the Prophet had cleansed it from everything but its stone. The Rock is sometimes identified as the place where Isaac was sacrificed by Abraham,²⁹⁰ whereas the Ka'ba is seen as the sanctuary Abraham built for the exiled Ishmael.²⁹¹ Thus, the two places are strongly connected to each other not only by the *mir'āğ* of Muhammad.²⁹² After his 692 victory, 'Abd al-Malik rebuilt the Ka'ba in the cubic form it has today, together with the surrounding mosque.²⁹³ According to Theophanes, he first intended to use the columns from the Tomb of Mary octagon for this purpose, but his Christian secretary Sergius²⁹⁴ in Damascus persuaded him to not to do so, and instead had

²⁸⁵ Mango, "The Temple Mount AD 614-638" 14. This shrine was built under emperor Maurice, and seems to be the same mentioned by the unknown Maronite (above) as well as Theophanes (below).

²⁸⁶ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* 104ff. The name of this church is still visible in the present-day Arabic name Bir Qadisma.

²⁸⁷ I am not discussing the subject of hanafism here, since this is not a work on Islamic history; see elsewhere Hawting, *The Idea about Idolatry and Early Islam* 37f.

²⁸⁸ Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem" 40f.

²⁸⁹ Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* 204, which notes that in modern times the building was mostly visited by older people, until, after 1948, it became an important new symbol for the Palestinian self-consciousness.

²⁹⁰ And indeed did 'Abd al-Malik place the alleged horns of the ram there. See further in Elad, "Why did 'Abd al-Malik build the Dome of the Rock?" (34-35, 40-48).

²⁹¹ Lings, *Muhammad* 1-3, 12-14. Note that Islamic tradition provided the Ka'ba with a filicidal past too, Muhammad's grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib being said to have made a vow to sacrifice his son there, just like Abraham, however being prevented by his wife. The boy, of course, was the later father of Muhammad. See Bashear, "Abraham's Sacrifice of his Son and Related Issues".

²⁹² Which only emphasises their connection, as Muhammad is said to have been taken to the Temple mountain while praying in the Ka'ba. See van Ess, "'Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock" for a discussion on these traditions. Parenthetically, it is interesting to note that in some traditions on the *isra and mir'āğ*, the Prophet actually sees Abraham sitting with his back to the heavenly Ka'ba: cf. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* to surah 17.

²⁹³ Tabari, *Tārīḥ* II:854.

²⁹⁴ Sergius has been identified as the father, or grandfather, of John of Damascus, though Meyendorff was sceptic towards these, rather late, claims ("Byzantine Views of Islam" 116).

Justinian II send other columns from Constantinople.²⁹⁵ There can be no doubt that ‘Abd al-Malik felt favoured by God on all frontiers.²⁹⁶

The mosaic frieze inside the Dome of the Rock might be the first physical manifestation of Islam which is still existant.²⁹⁷ Some of its formulas are easily recognisable from the Qur’an, whereas other are only similar in their meaning, but they all give a picture of a religion which has a clear and distinct theology. Religion with God is Islām. Angels and Prophets are intermediators between God and humans, and Muhammad is the foremost. There will be a Day of Judgment. Only the dedication of ‘Abd al-Malik has been visibly treated by a *damnatio memoriae* under the ‘Abbasids, the name of the caliph being clumsily replaced with that of al-Ma’mun. But the multitude of sentences concerning the nature of Jesus is striking, giving rise to speculations about at whom the inscriptions were actually directed:

O people of the Book, do not exaggerate in your faith
And do not say anything but the truth about God:
Christ, Jesus, the son of Mary, was the Prophet of God and His Word
Which He laid into Mary through His Spirit
Believe in God and in his Prophets
And do not say: (God is) three;
Cease with that; it is better for you.
God is the One God; bow to Him.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6183: καὶ ἀπέστειλεν Ἀβιμέλεχ οἰκοδομήσαι τὸν τοῦ Μάκκα ναόν. καὶ ἠθέλησεν ἐπᾶραι τοὺς κίονας τῆς ἁγίας Γεθσημανῆ. καὶ παρεκάλεσεν αὐτὸν Σέργιός τις ἀνὴρ χριστιανικώτατος, ὁ τοῦ Μανσοῦρ, γενικὸς λογοθέτης καὶ λίαν ὀφκειωμένος τῷ αὐτῷ Ἀβιμέλεχ, καὶ Πατρικίος, ὁ τούτου ἐφάμιλλος τῶν κατὰ τὴν Παλαιστίνην Χριστιανῶν προύχων, ὁ ἐπίκλην Κλαυσῦς, αἰτούμενοι μὴ γενέσθαι τοῦτο, ἀλλὰ διέ-
ίκεσίας αὐτῶν πείσαι Ἰουστινιανὸν ἀποστεῖλαι ἄλλους ἀντὶ αὐτῶν ὅπερ καὶ γέγονεν.

²⁹⁶ On the further importance of this, see Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* 35.

²⁹⁷ It might otherwise be the Persian coins issued by Ibn az-Zubayr’s governors in Iraq; see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 552, and below. This is also in line with the earliest mosques we know. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 40-42.

²⁹⁸ yā-ʾahla l-kitābi lā taḡlū fī dīnikum wa-lā taqūlū ʿala llāhi ʾilā l-ḥaḡqa ʾinnamā l-masīḥu ʿĪsā bin Maryama rasūlu llāhi wa-kalimatuhū ʾalqāhā ʾilā Maryama wa-rūḥin minhu fa-ʾāminū bi-llāhi wa-rusulihī wa-lā taqūlū talāṭa antahū ḥayran lakum ʾinnamā Allāhu ʾilāḥun wāḥidun subḥānahū ʾan yakūna lahu waladun laḥū mā fī as-samawāti wa-mā fī l-ʾarḍi wakafā bi-l-āhi wakīlan. Q 4:171.

These formulas make it even more interesting to contrast the report of Ya'qubi, that the Dome of the Rock was intended as a rival to the Ka'ba, with the claims of Muqaddasi, that it was intended as a rival to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Symbolically, as we have seen, it could well be considered a second Ka'ba, but stylistically, it was a second Sepulchre, something which Creswell claims to have proven by the measures of the dome.²⁹⁹ If the Caliph used local craftsmen,³⁰⁰ the enchanting report on workers refusing wages (the gold instead being used to cover the outside of the dome) might say something about which impression the structure made on less horrified Christians.³⁰¹ It must have been the first representative building in Jerusalem since Heraclius entered the Golden gate; the latter possibly being walled up at this time in order to diminish memory of his triumph and further demonstrate the new superiority of the Temple Mount over Golgotha.³⁰² Legendary descriptions on the earliest ceremonies attached to the Dome try to imagine how early Islam was manifested to the inhabitants and visitors of Jerusalem:³⁰³ the Rock, attended by robed guardians, being anointed with perfume every morning, whose scent would fill the city as people came and went.³⁰⁴ Visually, the building still dominates the skyline of Jerusalem.³⁰⁵ 'Abd al-Malik also provided the city with a whole network of new and better roads, to increase pilgrimage and alleviate communications with the surrounding areas.³⁰⁶

Not only the young Muqaddasi, of course, might raise objections to these developments: even if Jerusalem had strong religious importance to the Muslims, would not

²⁹⁹ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 34ff. One should perhaps note that the Dome of the Holy Sepulchre was situated over a Rock as well: until the destruction wrought by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim in 1009, the Tomb of Christ was still contained in its "stony" cover, just as the Temple Rock contains a grotto under its surface. The death and resurrection of Christ on Golgotha is a thematic parallel to the sacrifice of Isaac on Moriah.

³⁰⁰ Blair ("What is the date of the Dome of the Rock?" 69, 85) argues for a coincidence with workers renovating the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in the 680s, whose new mosaic decorations commemorated Christian religious unity after the Sixth ecumenical church council.

³⁰¹ Sibt ibn al-Jawsi (d. 1256) quoted by Elan ("Why did 'Abd al-Malik build the Dome of the Rock?" 36f.)

³⁰² As Mango noted, it would have been the most convenient gate to enter when heading for the Holy Sepulchre from the east, but the Haram ash-Sharif now bars not only the gate, but the direct way between Golgotha and the Mount of Olives (the place of the ascension of Christ) as well. ("The Temple Mount, AD 614-638" 15).

³⁰³ And one should remember that Muqaddasi still in the tenth century describes it as a mainly Christian city.

³⁰⁴ Sibt ibn al-Jawsi (see above; the author was an inspiring preacher in the Seljuk era).

³⁰⁵ One should however remember that the present blue and white tiled façade is from the Ottoman era (the reign of Süleyman I) consisting of Persian-inspired Iznik faience instead of the original Byzantine-style mosaics.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, and Blair, "What is the date of the Dome of the Rock?" 67ff.

the cultural concessions to its local ways of expression stir feelings of estrangement to the Arabs loyal to Mecca? One immediate reason for ‘Abd al-Malik’s official proclamations of political *Islām* seems to have been the threats raised from the different religious opposition parties in the Arabic peninsula and Iraq.³⁰⁷ On the same time, one should not exclude the possibility that the caliph saw the opportunity to create a “Roman Islam” modelled on the Orthodox Christianity, defended by the need for a unity which the Messianic counter-movements were not able to offer. If Islam should prove to be more than Mecca,³⁰⁸ Damascus needed a language of expression that was adapted to the new world where it had chosen to settle.³⁰⁹ *Šağā’a* (boldness) and *‘asabīya* (group solidarity), to speak with Ibn Khaldun, might have warranted the prevalence of Islam in the desert; but to survive in the multicultural world of the Fertile Crescent, one needed smartness (*kayd*) and prestige (*ḥasab*).³¹⁰ With the occupation of the Temple mount, the building of the Dome of the Rock, and the walling-up of the Golden Gate, the caliph had presented both the emperor and the religious opposition parties with a more lasting challenge than military victories, a visual statement of faith that has survived innumerable wars and conflicts ever since.³¹¹

1.2.2. Emperors without Crosses

In this year [690-1] Justinian thoughtlessly broke the peace with ‘Abd al-Malik ... For he did not accept the money he got from ‘Abd al-Malik, the coins being of a new kind which had never been seen before ... When ‘Abd al-Malik heard about it, he devilishly pretended to ask Justinian not to break the peace, and accept the

³⁰⁷ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 552f.

³⁰⁸ Patricia Crone, of course, would have denied this at the time when she wrote *Slaves on Horses*: “the Arabs had conquered the Middle East in the name of a jealous God, a God that dwelt among the tribes and spoke in their language, and morally they did remain in Mecca” (p. 18). But even if tribal pride and “patriotic” sentiments certainly were present then as anytime in history long before the term nationalism was coined, the ‘Umayyad Arabs consisted of very different elements, and there was certainly no reason to consider the Bedouin as a moral ideal once Islam had become settled. The rebuildings of the Ka’ba under Ibn az-Zubayr confirms this; cf. Creswell, *Early Islamic Architecture* 15f.

³⁰⁹ Cf. the quotation from Tabari, on ‘Umar and Mu‘awiya (1.1.4).

³¹⁰ Cf. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima* 166passim.

³¹¹ Ironically, the Crusaders would later confuse it with the real Jewish Temple of Jerusalem and, having no sense for eastern Roman symbolism on the victory over Judaism, revere it as a sanctuary of their own.

money since the Arabs could not put Roman imprints on their coins, whereas the gold was keeping its weight, and the Romans thus needed not be affected by the new coinage of the Arabs. [Justinian] misjudged this as a sign of fear ...³¹²

During the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, we seem, for the first time, to be presented with some direct Roman imperial reactions to the rise of Islam. In 680, the year Mu‘awiyah died, Constantine IV had assembled the Sixth ecumenical Church council in Constantinople, abolishing the unfortunate Monothelete doctrine introduced by Heraclius to reconcile the Monophysites of the Near East, as if it had begun to dawn on him that the latter region was now irrevocably lost.³¹³ With the withdrawal of the Mardaites, the Byzantine–Arab land border along the Tauros was left as a no-mans-land.³¹⁴ However, the cold peace almost immediately resulted in a war of words, whose main protagonist was the new emperor, Constantine IV:s son, Justinian II.³¹⁵

It was noted by the Maronite chronicler how Mu‘awiyah tried to strike gold and silver coins in 659, but that these were not accepted “since they had no crosses on them”. No such coins have been preserved; Roman, and Sassanian³¹⁶ currency was still recycled or imitated in Syria during this time – most likely because there was no Roman minting in the area before the arrival of the Arabs.³¹⁷ Yet the Maronite report remains interesting for its early

³¹² Τούτω τῷ ἔτει τὴν πρὸς Ἀβιμέλεχ εἰρήνην Ἰουστινιανὸς ἐξ ἀνοίας ἔλυσεν· καὶ γὰρ ... τὸ σταλὲν χάραγμα παρὰ Ἀβιμέλεχ νεοφανὲς ὄν καὶ μηδέποτε γεγονὸς οὐ προσεδέξατο. ... καὶ ἀκούσας ταῦτα Ἀβιμέλεχ, ὑποκριθεὶς σατανικῶς παρεκάλει μὴ λυθῆναι τὴν εἰρήνην, ἀλλὰ δεχθῆναι τὴν αὐτοῦ μονήταν, ὡς τῶν Ἀράβων μὴ καταδεχομένων τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων χάραγην ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις νομίσμασιν, τῆς ὀλκῆς τοῦ χρυσοῦ διδομένης καὶ μηδεμιᾶς ζημίας τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις γινομένης ἐκ τοῦ νέου χάρασσειν Ἀραβας. ὁ δὲ τὴν παράκλησιν εἰς φόβον νομίσας ... Theophanes *Chronographia* AM 6183.

³¹³ Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, 6. It did, however, result in a return of Orthodox sympathies to the empire, as is proven from the works of Athanasius of Sinai.

³¹⁴ Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus* 121.

³¹⁵ Justinian II seems to be the last Roman emperor of whom a monumental portrait in the Late antiquity tradition has come down to us: he is depicted, as a young crown prince with his father and uncles, on a mosaic in Sant’ Apollinare in Classe outside Ravenna, replacing an older mosaic of Theoderic. Head, *Justinian II* 22-4.

³¹⁶ Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II* 71. The Sassanian mint was initially the most used model; such imitations – with Arabic additions – were still made at the beginning of the eighth century and would occasionally still depict fire-temples (remade into *mihrahs*) on the reverse side.

³¹⁷ Bates, “Byzantine Coinage and its Imitations” 383f. Cf. also Robinson, *Empire and Elites* 51ff.

mention of Muslim aversion to the Cross.³¹⁸ The ‘Umayyads might have imitated their Roman predecessors in Syria in several other regards, but they clearly did not concede on this point, and their refusal seems to have presented them with a greater propagandistic problem than the building activity on mount Moriah. The iconography of the Roman currency had emphasized two things: the cross and the emperor, which, occupying one side each of the coins, nicely fitted to the words of Christ on Roman taxpaying.³¹⁹ If we are to believe the Maronite, Mu‘awiyah tried to keep the emperor but remove the cross, which was not so easy, amidst a middle-class for which Christian unity had meant economic stability: even for less pious citizens, the cross was still a symbol of the *Pax Romana*.³²⁰

Roman coins from the late 7th century show an increase in artistic detail and realism, partly a reversal to prototypes from the fourth century.³²¹ The Type I coins of Justinian II (685) which were still struck throughout the Mediterranean as far as on Sardinia and in Carthage, depicts the emperor holding a globus on the obverse side, the cross on steps on the reverse. But the Type II coins come with an innovation: on the obverse side is now seen an intricate image of Christ *Pantokrator* and the Latin text REX REGNANTIUM whereas the emperor, holding the cross on the reverse side, is described as SERVUS CHRISTI.³²² The term “King of kings” might sound like yet another echo of the Persian *Shahinshah*, but here the title is applied to the triumphant Christ.³²³ Heraclius had appeared as the servant of the crucified Messiah, whose cross he had carried; but his great-great-grandson rather appears as the servant of a celestial Victor resembling the ancient image of Zeus.³²⁴ Justinian II is famous

³¹⁸ Griffith, “Images, Islam and Christian Icons” 123f. Cf. the early reports on how the Arabs are “debasing the Cross” (Sophronius) or how ‘Umar had the cross on the Mount of Olives taken down in order to build the al-Aqsa (Theophanes).

³¹⁹ *Luk.* 20:19-26.

³²⁰ Dinkler, “Das Kreuz als Siegeszeichen” 19.

³²¹ Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II* 28, Bellinger, “Coins and Byzantine Imperial Policy” 73.

³²² *Ibid.*, 46., Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* IV:65.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 52.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 58, but this tendency is traceable already in the late 5th century. Breckenridge contrasts the “Zeus-like” Christ to the short-bearded or beardless Christ well-known from the early Christian art, which seems to have lived on somewhat longer in Syria and in fact made a reappearance on the Type III-IV coins from the second reign of Justinian II (705-11). Parenthetically, this Near eastern image of Christ could be likened to some early Islamic traditions pointed out by van Ess (“Die Himmelfahrt Muhammads und die frühe islamische Theologie”) bringing the ‘Umayyads in connection with Islamic antropomorph conceptions of God in the form of a youth.

for convocing the Quinisextum church council in 691-2, which recommended the depiction of Christ in human form, instead of symbolised by a (sacrificial) lamb.³²⁵ This church council (“the fifth-sixth”, officially intended as a mere confirmation of the foregoing two councils) was a crucial defining point for the future Byzantine religion, culture and politics;³²⁶ if it was also the origin of the type II coins, these must have been issued from 692.³²⁷

The iconographic shift in the empire either precedes, follows or coincides with the important changes in the visual propagandistics of the caliphate already exemplified by the Dome of the Rock; it is however difficult to say what is the hen and what is the egg, since all events seems to be overlapping each other in 691-92.³²⁸ Under ‘Abd al-Malik, a thorough monetary reform is implemented in Syria for the first time, gold *dirhams* with the same weight as the Roman *solidi* being struck in Damascus.³²⁹ Four of the earliest known examples still bear the picture of the emperor and the Latin inscriptions VICTORIA AUGU/CONOB, whereas the Cross on the reverse side has been replaced with a stick (the “staff of the Prophet”³³⁰?). This iconography, however, soon changes: re-using older issues of Constans II or Heraclius and his sons (crosses removed) together with the Islamic *šahhada* (“there is no god but God and Muhammad is His messenger”), the *hiğra* date and the notation DAM for Damascus,³³¹ it culminates with an issue that gives us a rare visual glimpse of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik himself, standing in full figure with long beard and hair, dressed as an emperor but holding a sword instead of a globus,³³² surrounded by a text addressing ‘*Abdu-l-lāh* ‘*Abd al-*

³²⁵ Grabar, *L’Iconoclasme Byzantine* 47.

³²⁶ The Quinisextum council forbade Pagan customs still abundant in the empire, especially traditions related to the ancient wine-god Dionysos, and it also forbade Jews to bath together with Christians. More noticeable, however, is its open rejection of practises in the Latin West, which was not even properly represented at the council, thus angering the pope and causing the first severe opposition towards Constantinople from Rome. Head, *Justinian II* 65-79.

³²⁷ Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II* 78-90. The Justinian type II coins reappeared as patterns for Byzantine coinage during the “Macedonian Renaissance” in the ninth century.

³²⁸ Note that Blair, (“What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?”) takes many of the facts mentioned in this chapter as an argument for a somewhat later date for the Dome of the Rock.

³²⁹ Grierson, “The Monetary Reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik”.

³³⁰ Cf. Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism Christianity and the ‘Umayyads* 57. This would also fit with the suggestion of Crone and Hinds (*God’s Caliph* 24f) that the Prophet became an important legitimising figure after 685.

³³¹ Bates, “Byzantine Coinage and its Imitations” 385ff for its prototypes.

³³² This, of course, could mean two things: either that the world was yet waiting to be conquered by the sword of the caliphs, or that it was guarded by the latter (cf below, 1.2.3 and 1.3).

Mālik ‘amīr al-Mu’minīn, (God’s servant, Abd al-Malik, Commander of the Believers).³³³ The name ‘Abd al-Malik can itself be read as “the servant of the King,” the King signifying God, who is called both *Mālik Yawm ad-Dīn*, King of the Day of Judgement, and *Mālik al-Mulk*, King of the Kingdom, in the Qur’an. This would correspond perfectly to the title SERVUS CHRISTI - REX REGNANTIUM found on the post-692 coins of Justinian II, but it might also be a pure coincidence since the caliph already had this name before.³³⁴ It is anyway noteworthy that Eastern Mediterranean currency thus changed its symbolic language from Latin to Arabic. This does not mirror the linguistic situation in the region, where Greek, Syriac and Aramaic would have made up the main languages (and apart from that, few people could read); but it marks a change in political symbolism from *Pax Romana* to *Islām*.³³⁵

It is not clear whether this was the coinage that angered Justinian II; 691-2 as reported by Theophanes would have been a too early date, though it fits perfectly with the end of the *fitnas* and the ensuing boom of archaeological evidence on Islam.³³⁶ The feelings echoed by Theophanes could exemplify a general frustration in Constantinople in face of the new power, which even under peaceful conditions challenged the symbolical superiority of the old empire. In fact, some Arabic chroniclers report a very similar story, which concerns the import of papyrus from former Roman lands now under ‘Umayyad authority: according to them, ‘Abd al-Malik provoked the emperor by providing every exported papyrus scroll with a Qur’anic headline in Greek and Arabic, whereupon Justinian II threatened to start insulting the Prophet on his coins.³³⁷ Papyrus being frequently used in Roman realms, this story is of the same type as the report on the coinage, the caliph using different “Trojan horses” to spread the message of Islam beyond his own realms.³³⁸ However, it also complicates everything by claiming that it was the subsequent imperial threat to make anti-Islamic coins which caused the caliph to issue his own coinage.

³³³ Morrisson, “Monnayage Omeyyade” 310f.

³³⁴ The naming of the ‘Umayyad caliphs could be the purpose of a study in itself; it suffers to say that their names, for several reasons, have not been very common in later Islamic history.

³³⁵ Latin remained as a language of official titles and ceremonials of the emperor in Constantinople long after it had ceased to be spoken. But just as a ceremonial language can fill a ceremonial function without actually being understood, so do the Arabic coin texts offer a clear visual change without the urge to be read.

³³⁶ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 554, Robinson, *Empire and Elites* 52.

³³⁷ Baladhuri, *Futūḥ al-Buldān* 283-4.

³³⁸ Cf. Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus* 141-150.

Of course, a third solution is not unconceivable: that the caliph felt uneasy about the new, post-Quinisextum coinage of Justinian II and therefore started his own mint.³³⁹ The explanation of Baladhuri, that ‘Abd al-Malik’s coinage was a precaution against non-Islamic propaganda coins rather than the opposite, also goes well with Theophanes quoting the caliph “that the Arabs could not put Roman pictures on their own coins”.³⁴⁰ Internal factors in the ‘Umayyad empire thus should explain why a further imitation of Roman imperial propagandistics became unattractive after 691-92: either the post-Quinisextum imperial image did not match that of the caliphs anymore, or the image of the latter went through radical changes as a consequence of the “year of unity”, after which they had Arabic troops to pay in the east, being now rid of both Ibn az-Zubayr, Mukhthar and the *Ḥawāriğ*.³⁴¹ On the ‘Umayyad Type III coins introduced in 696-7,³⁴² all images have been replaced by text, quoting the sura 112 of the Qur’an saying that “God has not begotten and is not begotten”; the name of the caliph is also dropped on most issues.³⁴³ These coins were somewhat lighter, which Grierson attributed to a reversal to older Arabic weight standards.³⁴⁴ It was clearly money “of a kind which nobody had ever seen before”, skipping both crosses and emperors; it would continue to circulate long into the Abbasid era.³⁴⁵ At this time, road signs in Syria began to appear without crosses, instead bearing the *šahhāda*.³⁴⁶ For the moment, one should simply focus upon the symbolic rather than the artistic aspect of these developments.

Remains the question on who actually broke the peace. Allegedly, Damascus had promised to pay 365,000 solidi every year for the removal of the Mardaites: would this also have tempted the caliph to initiate the circulation of a new coinage which could proclaim for everybody that the emperor had a rival? If Theophanes is right to ascribe the controversy to the “devilish shrewdness” of ‘Abd al-Malik, one should not exclude the possibility that the

³³⁹ Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II* 75-7.

³⁴⁰ ὡς τῶν Ἀράβων μὴ καταδεχομένων τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων χαραγὴν ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις νομίσμασιν, cf. above.

³⁴¹ Cf. Sayed, *Die Revolte des Ibn al-As’at und die Koranleser* 127-152.

³⁴² Grabar opts for an earlier date as he brings this type in connection with the coin controversy (*L’Iconoclasme Byzantine* 77); however, then the caliph could not state that the coins held the same weight as the Roman *solidi*.

³⁴³ Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs* 69f.

³⁴⁴ Grierson, “The Monetary Reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik” 251f. Incidentally, it might have had Greek antetypes.

³⁴⁵ Blair, “What is the date of the Dome of the Rock?” 67. Only at this point does the Sassanid *Shahinshah* finally disappear from the silver coins as well, having hung on somewhat longer than the emperor; cf. below.

³⁴⁶ Griffith, “Images, Islam and Christian Icons” 125.

latter *let it appear* so to Justinian II, either by some early coins, or papyri, or both.³⁴⁷ The Qur’anic phrases quoted might have looked more disturbing to the illiterate than to the Christian who could read them,³⁴⁸ and one can imagine what a political humiliation their presence would have meant to the emperor, who realised that his *capital symbolique* was slipping out of his hands in the same pace as he received formal capital.³⁴⁹ The 688 peace had been favourable to Constantinople,³⁵⁰ but the ostentative ‘Umayyad rejection of the cross, the adaptation of Arabic for official purposes and, of course (but it will remain open to what degree the emperor understood it) the open proclamation of a theological doctrine which was, as a matter of fact, radically opposed to the one just promulgated by the Sixth Ecumenical Council, might well have stirred the young emperor, whose hot temper is documented.³⁵¹

Whatever the ultimate reason, political or personal, for Justinian II to take action, on the very battlefield,³⁵² his Slavic elite troops changed sides and went over to the ‘Umayyads, who had bribed them with gold, according to Theophanes.³⁵³ The emperor took a harsh revenge on their wives and children,³⁵⁴ but the following year, the Armenian *patrikios*

³⁴⁷ Cf. the suggestions of Bates, “Byzantine Coinage and its Imitations” 394. Breckenridge emphasises that the first ‘Umayyad coins have been preserved only in a small number and never seem to have made their way to Byzantine realms. But the influx of gold to the empire must have been tentatively problematic, since Roman merchants were forced by the Justinianic law not to sell gold to the “barbarians” but to bring it back to the empire when possible; cf. Grierson, “The Monetary Reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik” 264. Silver was demanded in the caliphate, but the *hexagrammata* of Heraclius were abandoned by Justinian II and Arabic silver *dirhams* were already before modelled on Sassanid coins depicting Khusraw II. Cf. Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs* 69.

³⁴⁸ Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus* 144. One should note that Christians most likely were those actively involved in the minting; Bates, “Byzantine Coinage and its Imitations” 392.

³⁴⁹ It was, after all, customary for Roman emperors to give *their* gold to foreign peoples in exchange for peace.

³⁵⁰ Lilie, *Die Byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber* 107ff.

³⁵¹ The *Liber Pontificalis* by Agnellus of Ravenna is especially noteworthy for its blood-curling stories about how the emperor got in a “Persian Rage” (*achameniam versus*, 506) and tortured papal envoys to death.

³⁵² Sebastopolis, on the other hand – if the place can be identified at all – would have required an Arabic incursion on Roman soil, which is confusing, and yet again makes some scholars doubt the report of Theophanes. A more prosaic reason of war might have been controversy on the condominium over Cyprus. Cf. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* IV.32ff.

³⁵³ An interesting fact reported here is that the Arabs should have hung the peace treaty on their spearheads, just as had the troops of Mu‘awiya done with the Qur’an during the battle of Siffin. *Chronographia* AM 6184.

³⁵⁴ Oikonomides, “Silk Trade and Production: The Seals of Kommerkiarioi” 51ff. connects Theophanes’ report on Justinian “making himself rid of” (ἀνειλε) their families at the Marmara shore with the extraordinary big sale of slaves traceable from 694/5 Bithynian seals.

Smbat Bagratuni went over to the Arabs as well.³⁵⁵ Finally, in 695, riots broke out in Constantinople; the emperor was deposed, had nose and tongue slit and was sent into exile. Imperial prestige seems to have been very low.³⁵⁶ During the course of the next five years, Carthage and the rest of northern Africa fell to the Arabs.³⁵⁷ A century of unabated military setbacks for the Roman empire, in Europe, Asia and Africa, had finally undone the prophecy of Constantine the great: the Cross was no longer a sign of imperial victory. It might well have contributed to an accelerating abandonment, rather than a considerate overthrow, of Christian symbols in Syria and beyond.³⁵⁸ ‘Umayyad hesitation about what to substitute the cross with indicates that they were initially unsure on whether the *šahhada* was a credible alternative, but the triumphs of the 690’s – first over the Islamic opposition groups, and then over the Romans – seems to have swept aside their doubts.

1.2.3. Guardians of Paradise

And this [*Islām*] is the path of your Lord, a straight path. We have presented a straight message for those who recall it.

For them, there is a House of Peace in the presence of their Lord; He is their patron in the place they have been striving for.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵ Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6185. The different Armenian aristocrats, however, were more or less changing sides in the conflict all the time; it might merely be mentioned as an example of how low confidence in the emperor was at the moment.

³⁵⁶ The traditional accounts of Justinian’s two reigns are filled with unusually grisly details which, even if they are exaggerated, indicate that his policies eventually back-fired both in Constantinople and beyond. Ironically, just like his great-great-grandfather Heraclius, he would later recover in the historical memory, even being listed as a saint in some Orthodox calendars. Cf. Hope, *Justinian II*, 70-1, 96.

³⁵⁷ Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* V 98 claims that this barred the way for the empire to the gold mines of Africa, a problem (where did the empire acquire its gold?) which we are not going into here.

³⁵⁸ A report on openhanded ‘Umayyad debasement of Christian symbols concerns a grandson of ‘Abd al-Malik, who, upon visiting a church, is said to have spat in the face of an icon and said that he was able to annihilate all Christians in Syria. Given the overwhelming Christian presence in the ‘Umayyad bureaucracy this was hardly an official stance, but it clearly indicates a common despoliation for Christianity among the Muslim Arabs.

³⁵⁹ wa-hādā širaṭu rabbika mustaqīman qad faṣṣalnā l-āyāti li-qawmin yaḍkarūna. Lahum dāru s-salāmi ‘inda rabbihim wa-huwa walīyuhum bi-mākānū ya‘malūna. Q 6:126-7. Note that Paradise here is called the Dār as-salām (house of *peace*), whereas the Dār al-islām indicates the lands of Islam (house of *submission*) on earth.

The final stage in the rapid development of Islam from faith of Arabic invaders to Mediterranean imperial *Herrscherreligion* seems to be reached under the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik’s son al-Walid (705-715). The “Byzantine-Arabic Chronicle of 741” takes a somewhat self-contradicting position towards him, acknowledging him as a prudent ruler, although he was “destitute of divine favour”.³⁶⁰ The last statement is quite understandable from a Christian viewpoint, for one of Walid’s first actions as a caliph was to transform the church of St. John in Damascus into a mosque.³⁶¹ How he did it is debated; on a now lost inscription, the caliph was bragging about having demolished the church and erected the mosque in its place,³⁶² but the existant building conforms so clearly in style with pre-Islamic tradition that some Western scholars doubted if this really could be true, and if Walid did not simply make some major alterations to the Christian basilica.³⁶³ Creswell disavowed them with the simple argument, that the form and size of of the ‘Umayyad mosque surpass those of any Christian structure in the area;³⁶⁴ and Grabar further emphasised his point by saying that the first Imperial mosque of Islam is in fact more true to the room impact of the *pre-Christian* Roman architecture.³⁶⁵

In his study of *ḡihād* and the ‘Umayyads, Khalid Yahya Blankinship poetically but not unjustly notes that if the Late Antiquity Christian basilica resembles a rowing boat or dromone,³⁶⁶ the community forming a vertical crowd aiming towards the altar, the early Muslim mosque resembles a land battlefield formation, the community standing in broad, horisontal flanks behind the prayer-leader.³⁶⁷ By coincidence, this becomes most striking in Damascus,³⁶⁸ where the old Jupiter temple was split between Christians and Muslims for some seventy years, the Christians keeping the closed *naos* and praying inside it, facing the eastern

³⁶⁰ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 623.

³⁶¹ Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6199.

³⁶² Mas’udi, *Murūğ ad-dahḥab* V:362-3.

³⁶³ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 59-64.

³⁶⁴ “How scholars and archaeologists can bring themselves to believe that a church of such an extraordinary type, over 136 m. long with one flank entirely open to the courtyard, ever existed, really is amazing. There is no mystery about the pre-Muhammadan churches of Syria; the type is well known thanks to the fact that they have been preserved, literally by dozens, in Northern Syria.” *Ibid.*, 62-3.

³⁶⁵ Grabar, “Islamic Art and Byzantium” 73.

³⁶⁶ Or, as John Chrysostomos perhaps would have put it, a new ark of Noah in the deluges of a troubled world.

³⁶⁷ Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State*, 15-6.

³⁶⁸ As the Muslim *qiblah* there deviates roughly 90 degrees from the Christian “qiblah” (the east).

or western short side of this smaller, but likewise rectangular structure,³⁶⁹ and the Muslims praying along the broad southern wall of the rectangular *temenos* or courtyard, facing Mecca.³⁷⁰ It means that what al-Walid probably did, was to take down the *naos* – which was the church – and erect a new, large prayer hall to the southern wall. This three-aisled construction, upheld by corinthian columns and etruscan colonettes, resembles a basilica if viewed from the eastern or western short side, but the aisles are all of equal size, the domed transept is situated in the middle, and the whole building is much “longer” – which means broader when seen towards the *qiblah*.

Creswell argues that the original building had an open inner façade, closed with curtains, like the palace of Theoderic in Ravenna³⁷¹ This made the courtyard a vital part of the complex, not merely as the site of the ablution fountain which gives ritual access to the inner prayer hall, but also as an assembly square connected to the outer world of the buzzing city.³⁷² It is much more than a *masğid*, a place for praying; it is a *ğāmi*^c, an assembly space for the Muslims,³⁷³ taking the propagandistic development from the al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock a step further, by not only replacing the most important Christian church in Damascus, but abandoning the closed Christian *basilica* to rehabilitate the open Roman *forum*.³⁷⁴ If the Christian cities of Late antiquity had been clustered around a vast multitude of smaller or greater churches and sanctuaries,³⁷⁵ the new mosques were open, centralised structures, often one per every larger city, where the assembled Muslim congregation would manifest their united power over the disunited non-Muslim sects better than any military parade of troops.³⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that similar manifestations of Christianity in the cities, such as bellringing and processions, first are reported to have faced restrictions under the

³⁶⁹ Depending on where the entrance of the actual temple inside the *temenos* was situated; Creswell concludes that this might have made the church in Damascus west-orientated, just as many other ancient basilicas.

³⁷⁰ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 65-73.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 74. That is, as it is known from the mosaics in Sant’ Apollinare nuovo. It could actually fit together with Sibte ibn al-Jawsi’s descriptions from the interior of the Dome of the Rock as well; cf. above, 1.2.1.

³⁷² And containing the peculiar “tax-box” known as the *Bayt al-Māl*.

³⁷³ Cf. the etymology of the words συναγωγή and ἐκκλησία.

³⁷⁴ Toueir, “Die Omajjadischen Denkmäler in Syrien” 282. The Latin *forum* relates to the Greek ἀγορά, the *basilica* to the στοά. Compare this social function of the official mosque to the Druze *halwa* (seclusion)!

³⁷⁵ Cf. Michel, *Les Églises de l’époque Byzantine et Umayyade de la Jordanie* 103.

³⁷⁶ Cf. Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together* 37ff.

reign of Walid.³⁷⁷ Externally, the complex maintains a fortification-like character with (mainly) windowless walls and defense towers, but the latter get a new function as minarets, calling the believers to prayer from all directions.³⁷⁸

Did the ‘Umayyads pursue a consistent strategy to islamise urban life, urbanise Islam, or both?³⁷⁹ From the time of Walid remains the never finished town of Anjar, half-way between Damascus and Beirut, new-founded with a Roman-style square town plan and a central *tetrapylon*.³⁸⁰ Much remains unclear regarding its purpose: if it was intended for civil or military purposes, as a regular “city” or simply as an extended countryside estate, built for Muslims only, and to what degree.³⁸¹ Yet its fusion of ancient Roman and modern Muslim patterns are striking, recalling the strong military nature of both: the battlefield form of the Muslim prayer house fits perfectly into the military-camp outline of the Roman-style city. Unfinished as it is, Anjar shows that the “urbanising” intentions should not be exaggerated; despite some later examples, such as the reconstruction of the colonnated arcade at Palmyra under Hisham I,³⁸² the caliphs were not able to stop the urban decline that had begun in the 6th century.³⁸³ But in order to understand the full range of their efforts, one should also consider ‘Umayyad building activities in the interiors and the outskirts of the desert, where many of them resided – presumably, it has been said, because they longed back to the desert.³⁸⁴ In fact there were at least two more prosaic reasons for the geographic shift of residence towards the inlands. First, the desert would be slowly overtaking the sea as the economic marketplace.³⁸⁵ Secondly, the inlands had been particularly vulnerable to the invasions from the desert, and the old landholders had fled in large numbers, causing a much more dramatic change in

³⁷⁷ Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* 167. But the first report on Walid being angered by the sound of a *naqus* is vague; more consequent actions were taken first under ‘Umar II.

³⁷⁸ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 58.

³⁷⁹ An interesting example offers Bostra, the capital of Roman *Arabia*, which was incorporated not only within the administrative units of the new rule, with two monumental mosques in its midst, but in Muslim narratives emphasising its historical role in Islamic history *before* the conquest: as a boy, the Prophet Muhammad was reported to have met the monk Bahira there and been foretold his coming mission to mankind. Foss, “Syria in Transition” 241-58.

³⁸⁰ Cf. Hillenbrandt, “Anjar and Early Islamic Urbanism”.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁸² Assa’d, “Palmyra in islamischer Zeit” 360.

³⁸³ Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* 302ff.

³⁸⁴ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 93ff.

³⁸⁵ Kennedy, “The Impact of Muslim Rule on the Pattern of Rural Settlement” 296f.

settlement patterns.³⁸⁶ The abandoned lands were distributed among the new rulers, and from the time of Walid, the plains were now filled with desert castles and country estates for the caliph. Their outline corresponds to the Roman *castrum*,³⁸⁷ but their interiors served peaceful purposes, which makes the comparison to a desert monastery more justified.³⁸⁸ Perhaps the old Persian word *paradise* in the sense of an enclosed garden describes them best, surrounded as they are today by the desert in all directions³⁸⁹ – but then one should remember that in ‘Umayyad times these areas were the subject of much care to keep the grounds fertile and the irrigation systems in order.³⁹⁰ Located in the borderland between the desert and the fertile areas, the ‘Umayyad estates manifest a power which relied on them both.³⁹¹

The existant monuments – Minya, Mshatta, Qusayr ‘Amra, Qasr al-Hayr (*al-šarqī/al-ğarbī*), Khirbat al-Minyah and Khirbat al-Mafyar, to mention the most famous – are all remarkable for their synthesis of Mediterranean and Near Eastern villa architecture,³⁹² and their rich decorations which stand out as a final glimpse of the world of antiquity.³⁹³ There as well did the bucolic “good life”, a peaceful and prosperous earth,³⁹⁴ play a central role to artistic imagination,³⁹⁵ which does not simply imply that the ‘Umayyad *triclinias*, reception rooms and bathhouses are monuments of imperial hedonism. Rather, Fowden has shown how the ancient motives are finally incorporated with the Qur’anic concept of *ğannah* (paradise) as the ‘Umayyad prince is depicted as Adam, the first “Caliph of God” on earth.³⁹⁶ Here we might leave aside the references to Arabic poetry and Greek mythology (which required a

³⁸⁶ Grabar, “Islamic Art and Byzantium” 74ff, Shaban, *Islamic History AD 600-750* 40.

³⁸⁷ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 82.

³⁸⁸ Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads* 175passim.

³⁸⁹ The Karl-May-like story about the Austrian orientalist Alois Musil discovering and documenting Qusayr ‘Amra 1898-1902, while caught between the rivalling bedouin tribes Ruwala and Banu Sakhr in a since long abandoned and haunted part of the desert, is vividly retold by Fowden, *Qusayr ‘Amra* 1-12.

³⁹⁰ Kennedy, “The Impact of Muslim Rule on the Pattern of Rural Settlement” 293, Fowden, *Qusayr ‘Amra* 279f. On the “Green revolution” of the ‘Umayyad empire, when sugar canes, cotton and citrus fruits were introduced to the Mediterranean, see Walmsley, “Production, Exchange and Regional Trade” 309f.

³⁹¹ Toueir, “Die Omajjadischen Denkmäler in Syrien” 287-292.

³⁹² Grabar, “Islamic Art and Byzantium” 75ff.

³⁹³ MacAdam: “the Umayyad period in particular represents in the plastic arts the last full flowering of Hellenism” (“Settlement and Settlement Patterns” 91).

³⁹⁴ Cf. the famous personification of Earth in Qasr al-Hayr al-ğharbi, Fowden, *Qusayr ‘Amra* 71f.

³⁹⁵ Maguire, “The Good Life”.

³⁹⁶ Fowden, *Qusayr ‘Amra* 137; *Studies on Christianity, Hellenism and the Umayyads* 52ff.

certain level of education to understand)³⁹⁷ and focus upon the more fundamental message expressed, not in a royal leisure time spent by hunting or bathing,³⁹⁸ but by the power that made such a lifestyle possible – the power of the caliph who defended the peace within whose realms he made the deserts flower and the earth abound.

From the reign of Hisham I (724-743) dates the palace complex of Khirbat al-Mafyar outside Jericho, featuring a standing image of the caliph on the façade over the doorway, sword in hand just like on the coins of ‘Abd al-Malik.³⁹⁹ On a mosaic floor inside what appears to have been a combined bathhouse and reception room,⁴⁰⁰ a tree is depicted surrounded by gazelles eating its leaves on the left side, of a lion killing a gazelle on the right. The motive has great resemblance to the few remaining mosaics excavated from the Great palace in Constantinople; there, the eagle killing a snake is a theme whose symbolic affinity to the Roman imperial self-image is quite obvious.⁴⁰¹ But if there are similar messages hidden in the mosaic of Khirbat al-Mafyar, who is the lion, and who is the gazelle? An interpretation would be to imagine the caliph sitting in their midst, his throne resting on the tree in the middle: in his right hand he controls the *Dār al-Islām*, in his left, the *Dār al-Ḥarb*.⁴⁰² It could serve as a metaphor of a power which rested upon two powers: the peaceful prosperity of the settled peoples, and the ferocious ability to warfare of the nomads.⁴⁰³ The tree, unnecessary to say, is a fruit tree, once again emphasising the connections with Paradise.⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁷ Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the ‘Umayyads* 97-114. I have not been able to retrieve Fowden’s latest work on this subject (“Greek Myth and Arabic Poetry at Qusayr ‘Amra”, Montgomery, Akasoy and Pormann (eds.) *Islamic Crosspollinations: Interaction in the Medieval Middle East*, Cambridge 2007.)

³⁹⁸ Fowden, *Qusayr ‘Amra* 57ff, 106ff.

³⁹⁹ See photography by Franz, “Entstehung und Anfänge einer islamischen Kunst”.

⁴⁰⁰ Fowden, *Qusayr ‘Amra* 53; Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran* 17passim.

⁴⁰¹ Brett, “The Mosaic of the Great Palace in Constantinople” 41. A related piece of art – although not being a mosaic – is the famous relief from Persepolis depicting a lion killing a bull.

⁴⁰² Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran* 45. Doris Behrens-Abouseif doubts if the small chamber next to the larger “music room” really could have been a convenient place for a throne, but does not contradict Ettinghausen’s interpretation (“The Lion-Gazelle Mosaic at Khirbat al-Mafyar” 11-18).

⁴⁰³ Paranthetically, I assume that if the caliph did sit in this niche as suggested, he would have faced the south (Mecca), with the fertile coastlands on his right side and the nomadic desert on his left.

⁴⁰⁴ Another interesting connection to this Near Eastern metaphor of royal power – easily recognised in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in *Dan. 4:17-33* – can be found in an article by Simo Parpola, “The Assyrian Tree of Life” (*JNES* 52:1993).

Entering the Grand mosque in Damascus and contemplating the mosaics still adorning its inner courtyard walls, one will find a similar Paradise of trees, rivers and palaces resembling the idyllic villas of Pompeii. Like a Christian monastery, it will appear as a peaceful haven in the midst of a troubled world, but like a Roman *castrum* it will also look like a bastion against the troublemakers, a spiritual battlefield for those hearkening to the caliph in his call for war on secterism.⁴⁰⁵ In contrast to the desert palaces, it is void of depictions of humans (or animals), but the visitors to the mosque will actively fill their place when following the call to pray, which the caliph will lead. To sum it up, *awwalu-l-muslimīna* (the foremost of the Muslims),⁴⁰⁶ either partaking in the lesser *ġihad* in the *Dar al-Ḥarb* (battling the secterists) or in the greater *ġihad* in the *Dar al-Islām* (praying in the mosque), enter *ġannah* (Paradise) led by the *ḥalīfatu-l-lāh* (the Caliph of God). Though there remains a certain danger of poetical exaggeration here, it is clear that the image of Paradise – whether one of material prosperity or spiritual calm – played an important role to the ‘Umayyads, not merely as an artistic vision of a celestial afterlife, but as a metaphor of their own rule on earth.⁴⁰⁷ As a matter of fact, the Arabs *had* conquered an earthly Paradise in Syria, if only in a materialistic sense, and to guard and maintain it was one of the caliph’s main concerns.

Walid’s mosque in Damascus became the prototype of many other structures; a few years later, his brother and successor Sulayman (715-717) had equal mosques erected in Ramla and Aleppo.⁴⁰⁸ Walid is also remembered for refashioning the mosque in Medina, pulling down the structures which had stood there since the days of the Prophet, and erecting a complex decorated in the same style as the mosque in Damascus.⁴⁰⁹ Walid reportedly requested Constantinopolitan workers and materials for these building activities, otherwise

⁴⁰⁵ A duality expressed in the saying about the early Muslims, “warriors by day and monks by night” (cf. 1.1.2).

⁴⁰⁶ Q 6:14, 163, 39:12. “Foremost” – to enter Paradise – should be understood as a nobility by means of eagerness and self-sacrifice, like someone fighting in the first row at the battlefield.

⁴⁰⁷ Cook and Crone made a point out of the “Keys of Paradise” mentioned in the *Doctrina Iacobi* as an insignia of Muhammad (cf. *Hagarism*) – but why, then, was this not used as a symbol by the ‘Umayyads?

⁴⁰⁸ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 108. The former was destroyed in an earthquake in 1033; the latter was burnt down by Nicephorus Phocas during his 962 conquest of northern Syria.

⁴⁰⁹ Tabari, *Tāriḥ* II:1192. According to a Muslim legend, one of the Christian workers tried to paint a pig over the *mihrab*, and then fell down from his ladder and died (cf. Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus* 178-9). Ironically, the same fate is said to have befallen a worker helping ‘Umar I to build the first al-Aqsa mosque (cf. above; Flusin, “L’esplanade du Temple à l’arrivée des Arabes”) but there it is provided with a Christian sensmorale: one should not lend a hand to such activities. Intended as warnings, these stories merely confirm that the religious borders were not as sharp as the narrators maybe would have preferred.

threatening to destroy more churches.⁴¹⁰ Justinian II (who, despite the inconvenience of having had his nose cut off, had returned to power in 705)⁴¹¹ then obeyed him. Considering the report of Theophanes on columns sent to ‘Abd al-Malik for the mosque in Mecca in 692,⁴¹² it seems that Justinian II was involuntarily very much involved in the erections of the first monumental mosques of Islam.⁴¹³ Yet more confusing is the fact that the destruction of the church of St. John in Damascus was part of these building activities, and we hear indeed about the emperor protesting against it.⁴¹⁴

It is unclear why the caliph would have made such demands at all; as the Dome of the Rock and the new al-Aqsa mosque show, Syria and Palestine clearly possessed artists as skilled as those in Constantinople. Perhaps it was intended as a kind of political bullying of an opponent which the caliph had no actual reasons to fear: I am mightier than you, I have torn down your church, I can tear down other churches, I demand those artists I prefer etc.⁴¹⁵ But the story is also a bit at odds with what has been exemplified elsewhere here: it suggests that Constantinople still would have been regarded as culturally superior to Damascus.⁴¹⁶ If there is something the ‘Umayyad caliphs had already shown, it is that they fully mastered the Roman *Herrscherideologie* and that they needed very few alterations to make it a convincing visual framework for their own religion.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁰ Gibb, “Arab-Byzantine Relations” 221-233.

⁴¹¹ Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* V:113.

⁴¹² Cf. above, 1.2.1. This is reported to have taken place in the middle of the escalating conflict over the coins.

⁴¹³ That is, Mecca, Medina and Damascus, but not Jerusalem: could it be since any Roman involvement in building activities there would have posed a symbolic challenge to the caliphate?

⁴¹⁴ Another irony: according to Theophanes (*Chronographia* AM 6186) Justinian II was overthrown in his first reign after demolishing a church in Constantinople as he expanded the imperial palace. – See otherwise Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus* 167-199 for a full discussion on the protest note to Walid. ‘Abd al-Malik had promised not to touch the church; Walid reportedly answered by likening himself to the king Solomon, who had undone the work of his father, king David, when he built the temple in Jerusalem. The parallel to Justinian I – who had “outdone Solomon” by building the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople – is obvious.

⁴¹⁵ Another report says that Walid tried to send pepper to a value of 20’000 dinars to Justinian II, which Stratos interprets as a kind of payment (*Byzantium in the Seventh Century* V 147). It is unclear why it was never dispatched; Justinian II was killed in 711.

⁴¹⁶ Grabar, “Islamic Art and Byzantium” 83.

⁴¹⁷“For the Muslims Byzantine ways were a means, not an end.” (Ibid., 87).

1.2.4. Mirror for Princes

It obliges the one who raises himself to the rank of Imam of the people and the faith to start by educating himself.⁴¹⁸

Though it does not politically concern the fate of the Roman world, a few words should be devoted to the personal self-image of the caliphs as it has already been touched upon with reference to the ‘Umayyad desert castles and its royal imagery.

As was mentioned above, many of the most splendid ‘Umayyad monuments date from the later era (718-749), but they still seem to incorporate the sum of experiences of a family that by then had ruled Syria for the fatal span of four generations.⁴¹⁹ Their worldly power is manifested in the famous fresco in Qusayr ‘Amra depicting the kings of the world, six standing figures of whom the Roman emperor, the Persian shahinshah, the Visigothic king and the king of Abyssinia are all mentioned by name on inscriptions in Greek and Arabic.⁴²⁰ Next to the badly damaged fresco, with its striking resemblance to pre-iconoclastic art of the Roman world, is what seems to have been a depiction of the “seventh king”, the ‘Umayyad Walid II (743-44) with his young sons and wives, reclining on cushions.⁴²¹

The meaning of such a depiction is clear, and perhaps not exactly justified: the ‘Umayyads had never personally defeated Khusraw (who had been overthrown after the victory of Heraclius) or Roderic (the king of the Spanish Visigoths whose Arab subjugators had been badly treated by the caliph Sulayman), neither had they managed to outwit the *Negus* and the Roman emperor. But precisely this discrepancy between the historical facts and the way they are depicted is interesting. What Walid II tried to keep up, less than a decade before his whole family was overthrown and brutally annihilated in Syria, was the “*topos* of centralisation” of the Islamic world,⁴²² just as had Heraclius in the Christian world when he entered Jerusalem.⁴²³ Khusraw and Heraclius, though they had been dead for a century, still

⁴¹⁸ man naṣaba nafsahu li-n-nāsi ʿimāman fī ad-dīni faʿalayhi ʿan yabdaʿa bi-taʿalīm nafsīhi. Ibn al-Muqaffa, *al-adab aṣ-ṣaḡīr* 14.

⁴¹⁹ This refers to Ibn Khaldun’s word on the prestige of a family (it lasts only for four generations).

⁴²⁰ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 92.

⁴²¹ Fowden, *Qusayr ‘Amra* 175-196, 211ff. The cushions were regarded as a particular luxury among the traditional Arabs (cf. the explicit descriptions of cushions in the Paradise of the Qur’an).

⁴²² Cf. Donner, “Centralised Authority” 352.

⁴²³ Cf. Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth* 138-149.

remained legendary characters in the popular mind, and the depictions of the six kings attending to the ‘Umayyad caliph would have appeared as the fulfilment of the will of the Prophet when he despatched letters to the rulers of the world with the invitation to Islam: *ʿaslam taslim*, submit, and you will be in peace. It is no expression of humility, but it indicates that the caliphs thought themselves as part of a Divine plan initiated by the Prophet.

The ‘Umayyad reign left literary traces which survived into the Abbasid era; mostly poetry (which perhaps does not contradict the accusations about a degenerated rule)⁴²⁴ but also moral works of education (*ʿadab*) written for them by court secretaries such as ibn al-Muqaffa (d.756/7) or Abdalhamid bin Yayha (d.749/50).⁴²⁵ Their blending of Islamic virtues with an aristocratic stoicism à la Marcus Aurelius is just one example of how the world of the Late Antique Roman Empire imperceptibly continued into that of the early Islamic caliphate and further into the Middle Ages – the world was the same; human nature was the same; only the gods had been exchanged for The God (Al-lāh):

Bestow upon God every morning, which He lets you enjoy to see, and in whose dawn of light He reveals your well-being, your thankfulness for the fortunes which He bestows upon you: letting you enjoy yet another day of functioning limbs, a healthy body, an abundance of benefits and visible gifts, and then recite from the Book of God [...] in which you will find healing for the heart from its diseases, the walkout of the whispers of the devil and his flubdub, the glory in the signs of enlightenment of all things, the director to the right path and the grace of all believers.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads* 42.

⁴²⁵ Lassner, *The Shaping of Abbasid Rule* 105ff.

⁴²⁶ āḡil li-llāhi fī kulli ṣabāḥin yun°imu °ilayka bi-bulūḡihī wa-yuḡhiru minka s-salāmata fī °iṣrāqihī min nafsika naṣīban tuḡ°aluhu l-lāhu ṣukran °ilā °iblāḡihī °iyyāka yawmaka ḡālika bi-ṣiḡḡati [ḡawariḡa] wa-°āfiyati badanin wa-subūḡi ni°ama wa-ḡuhūri kirāmatin wa-°in taqra°a [fīhi] min kitābi llāhi ... fa-°inna fīhi ṣafā°a l-qulūbi min °imrāḡihā wa-ḡilā°i wāsāwisi ṣ-ṣaytāni wa-safāsifihī wa-ḡiyā°ati ma°ālimi n-nūri tabyānan li-kulli ṣayin wa-hudan wa-raḡmatan li-qawmi yu°minūna... *Risālat °Abd al-Ḥamīd al-kātib* 175-6.

A sound and firm belief in the unity of God and submission to His will – for the caliph as well as for everybody else – thus serves the psychological purpose of establishing a feeling of collectedness and control, creating an atmosphere where rational decisions can be made.⁴²⁷

Inner peace within a world of troubles is a motif which has been dealt with in the foregoing chapter, but here it is transferred to the caliph himself, who is advised to be humble, dutiful, respectful towards others and grateful towards God. From the *Risāla* of ‘Abd al-Hamid, we learn that the prince should be on his guard against pride and passions, which are the enemies of sound reason; yet caution should not be a cause of indifference towards others. Sound feelings of shame should prevent him from nervous stuttering or blushing. He must be kind to his soldiers, but beware of exposing himself by chattering; gifts may be distributed among people of nobility, but he must beware of waste and gaudiness. He should always surround himself with soldiers or family members of noble mind and wisdom of life, behaving kindly and attentively in their company, thus earning their respect and sympathy, but beware of inappropriate jokes and gossip which later might hurt his own reputation. Against flattery and insinuations he must arm himself with sound scepticism, without hurting anyone in public or displaying feelings of anger; and if he has personal favourites at the court or among the soldiers, he must not disclose it when he is speaking to them.

The “Mirror” of Abdalhamid is no separate work, but a letter dispatched to the crown prince when he was at the frontier, and a vast part of it is concerned with military strategic matters. Thus it also gives a clear picture of how the justification of war could be perceived:

Stand up against your enemies, those who are called so in *Islām* since they have turned their back on the community of their own people, falsely claiming to be faithful rulers, but keeping it for legal to shed the blood of their followers.⁴²⁸

In the *Risālat aṣ-ṣaḥabat* of ibn al-Muqaffa, written for his new Abbasid overlords,⁴²⁹ it is clear that this role of the caliph – to decide who was a true Muslim and who was not – was no

⁴²⁷ Cf. both the *al-ʿadab aṣ-ṣaḡīr* and *al-ʿadab al-kabīr* of Ibn al-Muqaffa and, for the following summary, the *Risāla* of ‘Abd-al-hamid bin Yahya (all of which are found in the *Rasāʿil al-bulaḡā* collection edited by Muhammad Kurd Ali) esp. pp 176-187.

⁴²⁸ aṣmid li-ʿaduwwika al-mutassimi bi-l-ʿislāmi l-ḥāriḡi min ḡamāʿati ʿahliḥi l-muntaḥili walāyata d-dīni mustaḥīlan li-dimāʿihī ṭāʿinan ʿilayhim 188-9.

obvious matter.⁴³⁰ It is not an aspect to be discussed here, but it should be mentioned in order to show that despite of – or even because of – its “Roman” appearance, the ruling position of the caliphs was never contested.⁴³¹

1.2.5. Summary

Since this thesis is not concerned with the emergence of Islam itself, it has not discussed the question of possible antecedents to ‘Umayyad political *Islām*.⁴³² It should be made clear that what has been proposed in this chapter, is not that political *Islām* was modelled upon the *Pax Romana*, but that the former was made attractive to a civil population familiar with the latter.⁴³³ A few notes should serve to develop this topic.

A concept taken from Ibn Khaldun was earlier used here when discussing the building of the Dome of the Rock: *ḥasab* (prestige).⁴³⁴ It can be used as a complement to the more commonly quoted *‘asabīya* in order to cover different mechanisms of the social play.⁴³⁵ Prestige is not simply a question of building beautiful bathhouses or starting a mint: as was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the name *Islām* implicates the existence of a

⁴²⁹ Lassner, *The Shaping of Abbasid Rule* loc. cit.

⁴³⁰ Ibn al-Muqaffa, *Risālat aṣ-ṣaḥabat* 120ff.

⁴³¹ As Crone and Hinds emphasised in *God’s Caliph*, this is the original conflict between the caliph and the *‘ulamā’* (21ff). Cf. further app. 2 of the same work (esp. the letter of Yazid III on the Divine and universal mission of the caliphate).

⁴³² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 548 and ff. It is noteworthy that non-Muslim evidence of “mgharraye” seem to imply a social distinction between the conquering elite of *muḥağīrun* believers (to whom the conquered cities chose to submit) and the Arab warriors and raiders of any religious belief. This distinction is implicitly hinted in the Qur’an (49:14).

⁴³³ The question raised by Crone and Hinds to the Caliphal power (*God’s Caliph* 105) “given that Islam originated among a people accustomed to statelessness, it is odd, at first sight, that it adherents should have consented to the formation of so powerful an office” thus should be considered from the point of view that Islam, in its universal shape, did *not* exclusively originate among Arabs, for Arabs, but within the boundaries of Rome.

⁴³⁴ Cf. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima* 180ff.

⁴³⁵ Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism* 5. In fact, they seem to differ from each other just like a tribal state from a multicultural empire: *‘asabīya* is a semi-egalitarian principle of loyalty based upon physical or spiritual brotherhood *inside* a social group. *Ḥasab*, on the other hand, is related to a world of hierarchy and pluralism: it is an attractive feat perceived by people outside the group or person admired. More on this in part 3.

political as well as a spiritual *Leviathan* which asks for obedience.⁴³⁶ The name of the Biblical Beast here might seem like an unflattering reference to apocalyptic descriptions of the Arab conquest (which will be discussed later) but its modern Hobbesian meaning is not as anachronistic as it sounds.⁴³⁷ The *Leviathan* guards the worldly peace, protecting the population from the *bellum omnium contra omnes* and that was precisely what the Romans had once done in the Mediterranean.⁴³⁸ The empty space of the destroyed Jewish temple had been the Late Antique Roman-Christian manifestation of what happens to the obstinate sectarians who reject Christ, or the emperor, or both. So had the cross-on-steps introduced by the emperors on the coins to demonstrate Christian triumph over the Zoroastrian fire-temples, and possibly – in a combination of the two – the entry of Heraclius into Jerusalem, where the *in hoc signo* victoriousness of the Roman army was manifested in a way it had not been since the days of Constantine. When the ‘Umayyads chose to manifest the power of Islam, these were precisely the fields of symbolism where they concentrated their propaganda.

In outer appearance, the conformity of the army, the religion and the official documents, had long been a Roman trump card which could be used against an antagonist troubled by dissent.⁴³⁹ With an Islamic vocabulary, this weapon was now used against the former Roman subjects: Islam punished the Christians for their secterism and discord, forcing them to submit to the unifying power of the Muslim caliphate. Psychologically, the harsh call for submission to the caliph resulted, not in a bellocracy or a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, but in a rather well-organised conquest of the non-Arab lands, resembling that of Muhammad and the first Caliphs in the Arab lands before 634. If only for a limited period of time, their centralised hierarchy proved able to keep a strained peace not only among the Arabs and from them, but among the dissenting non-Muslim groups which could accept the intervention of a

⁴³⁶ “Submit, in order to be left in peace” (*ʿaslim taslam*).

⁴³⁷ Of course, it is also anachronistic to make use of Ibn Khaldun in this discussion. But Ibn Khaldun had busied himself with precisely the era we are discussing; the terminology of Hobbes, on the other hand, has mainly been used upon Islamic societies in modern studies (cf. Seyyed Vali Nasr, *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the Making of State Power*, Oxford UP 2001).

⁴³⁸ One might claim that there is an important difference here: the Romans received taxes for defending the civil population, the Arabs received taxes for abstaining from attacking them. But the ‘Umayyads also took a cultural stance for the settled peoples when they themselves became settled.

⁴³⁹ It is worth noticing how Georg of Pisidia likens Heraclius to Heracles, Persia to the many-headed Hydra.

third part.⁴⁴⁰ An intriguing question with which we should leave this discussion is to what the entire process was the result of a social elitism of the Arabo-Muslim warrior-class, actively cultivated by the ‘Umayyads and which could be seen as the cause of their sudden rise as well as their equally sudden fall.⁴⁴¹ At least it seems to conform with the traditional picture of the ‘Umayyad empire as a multireligious and multicultural state, consolidated in the *mawlā* system, appealing to a wide range of groups, vulnerable to the corruption and nepotism well-known from anti-Umayyad propaganda.⁴⁴²

Another question, why this development from a Muslim *‘umma* to an Islamic empire took place in Syria, and not in Hijaz or Iraq – for example around Kufa or Basra, where the Shi’i communities were steadily growing in the ruins of the Persian empire – is beyond the subject studied here, but to push the focus further to the following chapter, I would at least like to suggest that the Mediterranean had not entirely lost its economical attraction over the interior, and that its urban communities were in any case far stronger than those of Iran and Mesopotamia.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Here it is tempting to think of the *status quo* in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, whose key is in the hands of a Muslim family since Ottoman days, the different Christian groups being unable to keep peace between each other in the church.

⁴⁴¹ Crone, Hinds, *God’s Caliph* 106.

⁴⁴² Cf. Robinson, *Empire and Elites* 165-171.

⁴⁴³ As in many other cases in Syria, the real point of discontinuation seems to have been in the mid-Eighth century, as a major earthquake coincided with the Abbasid revolution. (Foss, “Syria in Transition” 241-58.) Cf. also Howard-Johnston, “The Two Great Powers” 196.

1.3. Holy War?

Our God, protect the incalculability of the People of Islam,
strengthen their dwellings,
let their estates bear fruit,
bring their warfare to an end in order that they can come and worship you,
and their opposition, so that they can find themselves in solitude with you;
until nobody on the whole earth is worshipped but you,
and let not one single of their foreheads touch the ground except for you!⁴⁴⁴

The previous chapter was concerned with the propagation of *Islām* as a common *purpose* of political struggle rather than an individual *motive* for it.⁴⁴⁵ At first glance, the two concepts might seem identical; but they are not stronger than the society that can give them a coherent meaning. Just because the advantages of centralised rule were propagated by Damascus, it does not mean that centralisation was a political reality.⁴⁴⁶ The kind of Arab raidings and pillage that had caused distress for the settled inhabitants of Syria now was a harsh reality for other neighbours of the Arab caliphate in Anatolia and the Mediterranean; and the whole topic

⁴⁴⁴ Allāhumma waqawwi bi-dālika miḥāla ahli l-Islāmi wa-ḥaṣṣinu bihi diyārahum wa-ṭammiru bihi amawālahum wa-farriguhum °an muḥārabatihim li-°ibādatika wa-°an munābaḍatihim li-l-ḥalwati bika ḥattā lā yu°bada fī biqā°i l-°arḍi ḡayruka wa-lā tu°affara li-°aḥādin minhum ḡabhatu dūnaka. Supplication 27:7 from *al-ṣaḥīfat al-kāmilat al-sajjādiyya*, the so-called “Psalms of Islam”, a Shi’i religious source traditionally ascribed to the fourth Imam, ‘Ali Zaynu’l-Abidin, the son of Husayn who survived the battle of Karbalah. The quotation thus does not mirror any ‘Umayyad sentiments, but it takes a common Islamic stance by praying for victories against “the enemies of God”: the lands of Indians, Romans, Turks, Khazars, Abessinians, Nubians, Zanjis, Slavs and Daylamites – cf. the “Six kings” fresco in Qusayr ‘Amra (1.2.4.) – The word *miḥāla* (incalculability) is part of an epithet of God in the Qur’an (13:13) signifying his almightiness (among other things, to thunder) and inconceivability.

⁴⁴⁵ As noted in the introduction to 1.2, *Islām* (submission) is a causative for *salām* (peace). This can be interpreted both as the spiritual peace felt when praying to God, and the physical safety of the *Dār al-islām*, or both of them, as rewarded in the Islamic *ḡannah* (the actual *Dār as-salām*). All three are seen as achieved through human strife (*ḡihād*) to battle sectarianism and discord (in the *Dār al-ḥarb*), spiritually or politically, until total submission to the will of God is achieved. Thus, the causality chain should be described like this: War > *Islām* > Peace; not Islam > War, though the latter interpretation is understandable from a Roman point of view.

⁴⁴⁶ Crone, Hinds, *God’s Caliph* 106f. Cf. ch. 2.1.2.

of caliphs establishing a settled state of *Islām* while propagating themselves as leaders of this *ġihād* movement remains one of the most confusing aspects of the early Islamic world.

With reference to Rome, it is tempting to swap the roles once again: if the *Dār al-islām* had replaced the *Pax Romana*, the *Dār al-Ḥarb* – the world of sectarianism and obstinacy, where *ġihād* is compulsory – would replace the “Barbarian world” where it had been permitted if not obliged for the peace-worshipping Roman emperor to wage war in order to preserve the peace (*si vis pacem, para bellum*).⁴⁴⁷ The problem is that what was considered as regions of the *Dār al-Ḥarb* by the caliph, was still considered as rightful lands of *Pax Romana* by the emperor, and conversely: what had become Barbarian lands to the emperor, was the caliph’s *Dār al-Islām*. It was a “war of peaces” that perhaps became a rhetorical and literary *topos* almost before it had started in real life.

1.3.1. The Great Creature

‘Umar wrote to Mu‘awiyā: “I have heard that the sea of Syria [the Mediterranean] exceeds the most vast thing on earth, that it requests from God every day and night to deluge the earth and swallow it up. How could I send troops to this obstinate infidel? By God, one Muslim is dearer to me than whatever the Romans have there.”⁴⁴⁸

In Islamic historical tradition, the diverging attitudes of ‘Umar and Mu‘awiyā towards non-Arab cultural and social differences receive a new dimension in their dispute over the Mediterranean. Whereas the governor in Damascus instantly seems to have realised the need for a Muslim fleet, the desert conqueror was shocked by what he was told about the “Great Creature ridden by a small one” (the sea compared to man).⁴⁴⁹ ‘Umar might have shared this attitude with the vast part of his Arab warriors overrunning the lands of Iran and Egypt with such success; but Mu‘awiyā and his advisors were to prove right in their foresight when

⁴⁴⁷ Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden* 193-208.

⁴⁴⁸ kataba ‘Umaru ‘ilā Mu‘āwiyata ‘innā sami‘nā ‘anna Baḥra š-Šāmi yašrifu ‘alā ‘aṭwali šay‘in ‘alā l-‘arḍi yusta‘dana Allāhu fī kulli yawmin wa-laylatin fī ‘an yufāyidu ‘alā l-arḍi fa-yuġarraḡahā fa-kayfa ‘aḡmilu ġ-ġanūda fī hādā l-kāfiri l-mustaṣ‘abi wa-ta-llāhi la-Muslim ‘uḡibbu ‘illā mim-mā ḡawati r-Rūm, Tabari, *Tārīḡ* I:2822.

⁴⁴⁹ ḡalqan kabīran yurkabuhu ḡalqun ṣaġīrun, *Ibid.*, 2821.

Alexandria was used as foothold for a Roman attempt to regain Egypt in 646.⁴⁵⁰ Three years later, Mu‘awiyah got permission from the new caliph, his kinsman ‘Uthman, to launch the first naval attack on Cyprus and already in the 650’s he won a decisive battle against Constans II.⁴⁵¹ Some aspects of this should be discussed here.

As already noted in the introduction, the Mediterranean had not only been an economical engine for the Roman empire but a purpose for its very existence. The Latin Romans (landlubbers in comparison to the Greek, Phoenician and Jewish traders that actually “populated” the sea) had once found their own role in the encompassing power of a third part that made this unruly and confusing world hearken to a central authority.⁴⁵² Nobody can claim that the Roman empire was peaceful, but by proclaiming the *pax* as its purpose, anybody acknowledging the advantages of it would hesitate to challenge it. Foreign invasions, raids and piracy could not threaten the *idea* about universal law and order in the Mediterranean: they could bring rivalling wars for their own gains, but no rivalling peace to the gains of the whole sea.⁴⁵³ As for the sea itself, it was – as ‘Umar said – a frightening creature surrounded by a dangerous and unfriendly world⁴⁵⁴ where the advantages of raiding and piracy were uncertain as long as there did not exist a certain peaceful prosperity to rob someone of.⁴⁵⁵

We are here touching upon the famous hypothesis of Henri Pirenne, which says that Islam caused the downfall of the ancient world since it prevented the Arabs from being absorbed by the Mediterranean civilisation.⁴⁵⁶ It is a far too wide-ranging topic to be dealt with here; but one might say that from the present viewpoint, it seems to have two faces. It

⁴⁵⁰ Stratos, *Byzantium in the Sixth Century* III:36f.

⁴⁵¹ The so-called battle at Phoenix, which is reported with unusual anecdotal detail by Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6146. (Curiously enough, Baladhuri states that ‘Uthman permitted Mu‘awiyah to embark on the naval expedition only if he took his wife along.) According to Tabari (who dates the battle to 651 or 655) I:2868, the Romans had the possibility to choose between fighting on land or at sea but preferred the sea.

⁴⁵² Horden, Purcell *The Corrupting Sea* 133ff.

⁴⁵³ Eickhoff, *Seekrieg und Seepolitik zwischen Islam und Abendland* 9-13.

⁴⁵⁴ Almond, *Two Faiths, One Banner* 16.

⁴⁵⁵ Horden, Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* 157: “Pirates are ... somewhat analogous to pastoralists ... They are easily *imaged* as ‘the other’, the dangerous inversion of the values of the settled world – or, in this case, of the world of trade. Yet, like pastoralists, pirates *actually* flourish only in profound symbiosis with that world.” Note that this conception of “the other” is a political and economical *other*, not a religious one.

⁴⁵⁶ Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* 130f. “La grande question qui se pose ici est de savoir pourquoi les Arabes, qui n’étaient certainement pas plus nombreux que les Germains, n’ont pas été absorbés comme eux par les populations de ces régions de civilisation supérieure dont ils se sont emparés?”

would be wrong insofar as the Arabs were actually absorbed by the world they conquered, resulting in an Islam that was no longer exclusively Arab. On the other hand, it would be right insofar as *Islām* provided the Arabs with precisely that concept of a rivalling peace through submission that could challenge the *Pax Romana*. At least two reasons might explain why this should have turned into a point of interest to the ‘Umayyads:

1) To avoid the “Great Creature” (if this was the intention of ‘Umar) would not only have meant a strategical problem for the young empire, namely the threat from the Roman sea against the coastal areas, but also an ideological one: how was the Islamic empire to justify its universal meaning in face of the still existing universalism of Rome?⁴⁵⁷ To simply iterate the Persian solution to the problem – by presenting the Mediterranean empire with an inland equal – might have been an option for the Islamic community of Iraq or in Hijaz, but the Syrian ‘Umayyads, living in the midst of the still essentially “Roman” world, are most likely to have aimed for other boundaries (in fact, their struggle for the Mediterranean started before they became caliphs, at a time when their authority in Syria was mostly involved in the clientage of non-Arabs whose confidence and respect they needed to win).⁴⁵⁸

2) It is possible that independent Arab parties could have spurred on westwards in search of new fortunes and battlegrounds, similar to how the German invaders had deluged Spain, France and Italy, resulting in independent or semi-independent kingdoms (as was indeed the fact later on, when centralised authority in the Islamic world broke down). Technically, they could also have learned to set sail without a central power, and embarked on pirate raids for their own gains. But to pose a more lasting challenge to the *Roman* sea – an *Islamic* conquest in its full sense – there had to exist a centralised authority that could keep peace, at least nominally, *within* the conquered territories.

One should of course avoid an exaggeration (or invention) of the “meaning” in political strategies from an era that was so uncertain and volatile. Mu‘awiyā’s attacks on the Mediterranean islands mainly caused distress for the civil populations on Cyprus (649), Sicily (652) Rhodes and Crete (655) but brought few lasting gains.⁴⁵⁹ Besides, the Roman thalassocracy had many other troubling enemies: at the defeat at Phoenix (which Christides

⁴⁵⁷ Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth* 140-1.

⁴⁵⁸ Crone, *Slaves on Horses* 49-57. Cf. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalypics* 75 on the fervour of some *Mawālī*.

⁴⁵⁹ Christides, “Arab-Byzantine Struggles in the Sea” 87-9.

calls “a classical example of naval warfare incompetence”)⁴⁶⁰ Constantinople had already lost Spain to the Visigoths, northern Italy to the Langobards, and the exarch Olympius used the Monothelete controversy as a pretext for a rebellion where large parts of southern Italy and Africa broke away from Constantinople.⁴⁶¹ While Constans II changed his place of residence to Sicily – the same year as Mu‘awiyah obtained the Caliphate – the Arabic expansion around the Mediterranean continued as before by way of the inlands: to the north through Anatolia towards Constantinople and to the west through Africa towards Spain.⁴⁶²

The Arab encounter with the North African Berber nomads resulted in a separate process of inculturation and islamisation that lies beyond the scope of this study,⁴⁶³ whereas the Arabic presence in Anatolia would haunt Byzantine-Muslim relations for centuries.⁴⁶⁴ Yet before dealing with the latter, the question should at least be raised to what extent the ‘Umayyad central power also struggled to direct the conquest of Africa from the desert interiors to the Mediterranean coastlands, which would be the areas where Roman political, cultural and religious dominance had been prevalent, and where now – unlike Syria – a major exodus of the Roman population ensued.⁴⁶⁵ Perhaps the most obvious example is the most telling: at the fall of Carthage in 698, the Arabs tore down its walls and destroyed the aqueducts in a deliberate attempt to deprive the Roman empire of its main foothold, but it took a long time before their own Mediterranean port, Tunis, started to develop.⁴⁶⁶ The Arab naval base there remained a weak one,⁴⁶⁷ and the dominating city centre in the region became

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., “The naval engagement of Dhāt aṣ-Ṣawāri” 1331-1345. The Arabs allegedly won it by tying their ships to the Roman ships and then fighting as if by land (a strategy that, ironically enough, had been used by the unexperienced Latin sea warriors at the dawn of Roman thalassocracy). From the curious report of Theophanes – who has Constans II changing clothes and fleeing in the middle of the battle – Stratos concludes that a Byzantine conspiracy had been forged against the emperor, causing the defeat (*Byzantium in the Seventh Century* 54).

⁴⁶¹ This was the pretext for the later arrests and mutilations of the pope and Maximos Confessor.

⁴⁶² Eickhoff, *Seekrieg und Seepolitik* 21ff.

⁴⁶³ However, see Savage, *Gateway to Hell, Gateway to Paradise* esp. pp29-62 for some interesting observations.

⁴⁶⁴ A complete list of early raids and expeditions was drawn up by Brooks (“The Arabs in Asia Minor”) 1898.

⁴⁶⁵ Talbi, “Le Christianisme maghrébin” 315.

⁴⁶⁶ *EF*² v. Tunis.

⁴⁶⁷ Eickhoff, op. cit., 41: “Zur erfolgreichen und auch nur notdürftig gesicherten Entfaltung ihrer Kräfte bedurfte die junge Flotte von Ifriqiya entweder der Flankendeckung der ägyptischen und syrischen Geschwader oder anderweitiger, innerer oder äußerer Ablenkung der byzantinischen Seestreitkräfte.”

Kairouan, located in the inlands to the south-west.⁴⁶⁸ Ibn Khaldun would much later reflect over the fact that Alexandria and Tripolis were known as “border towns” to the ‘Abbasids: they were seen as vulnerable to attacks from the sea (accordingly, the North African author doubts the advantages in such a location of a city).⁴⁶⁹

As for the reception of the Muslim conquerors in the Mediterranean, we are certainly not presented with anecdotes like that about the Greeks roaring with joy until stunned birds fell from heaven at the news about the Roman victory over Macedonia.⁴⁷⁰ A few noteworthy episodes have survived, as when people from Roman lands asked to be settled in Syria,⁴⁷¹ and in the play of power that led to the subjugation of Spain. According to the Latin “Chronicle of 754”, the latter conquest – just like the one in Syria – began by “raiding”, Arabs taking advantage of the existing civil strife among the Visigoths to establish themselves on the peninsula, and ended up with harsh consequences for those who tried to establish independent Arab kingdoms.⁴⁷² Thus, even if the actual military expeditions were undertaken by independent Arab parties waging *ḡihād* or looking for booty, the lasting consequences bore the symbolic stamp of the ‘Umayyad centralised authorities.⁴⁷³ Psychologically, the behaviour of the *Arabs* would not have facilitated their reception⁴⁷⁴ but the *Islamic* empire could have gained momentum as a potential guardian of peace and stability.⁴⁷⁵ Metaphorically speaking, even if the ‘Umayyad imperialists never learned to master the “Great sea creature”, they still had a trump card in their centralised power over the Arab “Beasts from the land”,⁴⁷⁶ whose less peaceful characteristics will now be discussed from a diametrically opposite viewpoint.

⁴⁶⁸ Not very far into the African interiors, but it seems reasonable to draw a parallel to the main ‘Umayyad city centres in Syria, which all straddled the coasts and the interiors.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima* 424-5.

⁴⁷⁰ An anecdote related by Valerius Maximus (*Factorum et dictorum memorabilium* 4.8.5; a less fanciful description is found at Livius, *Ab urbe condita* 33:32).

⁴⁷¹ *Chronographia* AM 6155-6.

⁴⁷² Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain 710-797* 26-51. The *Chronicle of 754* was still basing its chronology on Roman reigns parallel to those of the ‘Umayyad caliphs and the *hiġra*.

⁴⁷³ Possibly one crucial reason to why the battle of Poitiers has such a dubious legacy even today: from the Arabic point of view, it was not seen as the result of any centralised strategy, but from the Frankish, it was hailed as a such and became an important psychological victory for the emerging Christian empire in the West.

⁴⁷⁴ *The Arab Conquest of Spain* 42f.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 100ff.

⁴⁷⁶ Levitzon, “Conversion to Islam in Syria and Palestine” 291ff.

1.3.2. Apocalypse Now

[The Messenger of God] said: “You will march into the Arabic lands and subdue them for the sake of God; then to Persia and subdue her for the sake of God; then you will march against Rome and subdue it for the sake of God; then you will march against Antichrist (Dajjal) and subdue him for the sake of God.” Nafi’ [bin ‘Utbah] concluded: “Antichrist will not come ere Rome is subdued.”⁴⁷⁷

In his studies of Muslim apocalypics, David Cook suggests that expectations about the approaching end of the world was a most active element in early Islam.⁴⁷⁸ As noted above, individual motivations distinguish from common purposes; if Constantinople and Damascus aimed at similar purposes – universal empires of armed peace – similar impacts on the popular Christian or Muslim level should be considered on their own. End-time predictions, which makes up an important part of the earliest Islamic corpus including the Qur’an,⁴⁷⁹ seem to reveal popular attitudes common to Christians and Muslims: after all, the first Christians had also been expecting an immediate end to the world.⁴⁸⁰ But whereas the Late antiquity Eastern Roman world had only reluctantly accepted the Revelation of John,⁴⁸¹ the sixth and seventh centuries saw a new wave of apocalypticism,⁴⁸² culminating with the work of Pseudo-Methodius from Edessa, written in a Syrian context but later translated into Greek and further transmitted by the Burgundian Adso to the Latin West.⁴⁸³ It has often been put in direct relation to the Arab conquest and the afflictions it caused.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁷ qāla (rasūlu llāhi) tağzūna Ğazīrata l-°Arabi fa-yaftaḥuhā llāhu ṭumma Fārsia fa-yaftaḥuhā llāhu ṭumma tağzūna r-Rūma fa-yaftaḥuhā llāh ṭumma tağzūna d-Dağğāla fa-yaftaḥuhū llāhu qāla fa-qāla Nāfi°un (yā Ğābiru) lā nurā d-Dağğāl yaḥruḡu ḥattā tuftaḥa r-Rūmu. *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim, 8:178.

⁴⁷⁸ Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and Jihad” 66ff.

⁴⁷⁹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 331, 257ff.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. *Matth.* 16:28, 23, 24, *Mark* 13, *Luk.* 21 etc.

⁴⁸¹ Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* 7f.

⁴⁸² Meier, “Eschatologie und Kommunikation” 52-66, 70-3; Magdalino, “The End Time in Byzantium” 125-9.

⁴⁸³ Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser” 82-3. It seems to have been still current when the Turks besieged Vienna in 1683 (cf. note in *Byzantion* 5:1929-30 422-3.)

⁴⁸⁴ For the Arab empire as the “Fourth Beast” of Daniel, see *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* 105; cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 532f. Pseudo-Methodios does not subscribe to the same interpretation (cf. Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodios: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam” 141).

Now, one should note that to Pseudo-Methodius the Arab invasions are mere forerunners to the end of the world (the final destruction of Gog and Magog is believed to come from the North) though they play an important role in the wider apocalyptic context.⁴⁸⁵ According to Pseudo-Methodius, God has given power to the Arabs just as He once gave it to the Jews, not because He loves them, but because of the sins of the people they are conquering – because (as it is described) Christian men and women go around drunk in the streets like prostitutes, commit adultery with each another everywhere and indulge in all kinds of impurities.⁴⁸⁶ Therefore God will leave their land to the death and destruction from the hands of the desert people, which will rob them of everything and lay taxes on everyone,⁴⁸⁷ and install themselves as illicit rulers who are indulging in different depravities,⁴⁸⁸ causing all false Christians to abandon their faith to join them.⁴⁸⁹ But when the Arabs go so far as to deny the existence of a Christian redeemer, the “king of the Greeks” suddenly “awakes from his drunkenness” and comes to evict the Arabs from the lands of the Christians, pursuing them right into the deserts of Medina, conquering their native country and forcing their wives and children into a slavery that is a hundred times as painful as that which they had laid upon the Christians.⁴⁹⁰ Then there will be great peace and a people will live a moral and virtuous Christian life until the peoples of Gog and Magog break loose.⁴⁹¹

Gerrit Reinink has suggested that the text was written in the years 685-691 as a reaction to the building of the Dome of the Rock, among rising fears that the newcomers had come to found a rival religious empire.⁴⁹² In face of this, even a Syrian author would have put his hope to a Roman reconquest of the Near east.⁴⁹³ The church historian Kmosko took it as a proof that Pseudo-Methodius, despite living in a non-Orthodox context, was a Chalcedonian

⁴⁸⁵ *They resemble the beasts of the fields and the birds of heaven, and the Lord says to them: ‘Come together for the great sacrifice I have prepared for you; eat the flesh of the fat and drink the blood of the heroes.’*[Rev. 19:18] *And indeed the fat will be destroyed in Gabaoth: the kingdom of the Romans, the kingdom of the Jews and the kingdom of the Persians ...* From the German translation of Suermann, line 319-327.

⁴⁸⁶ Op. cit., 337-352.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 352-426.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 492-499

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 427-459.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 500-516.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 516-539.

⁴⁹² Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodios: A Concept of History” 185.

⁴⁹³ Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* 22f.

sympathiser.⁴⁹⁴ But there are some points of differentiation to make here. It is true that the author sees the “king of the Greeks” – which must be the Roman emperor – as a saviour who is going to “wake up from his sleep” and come to put things in order again after some “drunkenness” caused by the sins of the Christians. But rather than the representative of the Late Antiquity *Pax Romana*, this “Greek king” (which according to a different Monophysite tradition would be an Ethiopian king)⁴⁹⁵ has the characteristics of a mythical warrior-hero, a “Christian Alexander” who comes to make Jerusalem his capital and prepare the end times.⁴⁹⁶ If it is not an anti-Roman idea, it is at least non-Roman in its contrastation of Rome / Constantinople as a secular or temporal capital with Jerusalem as a heavenly and eternal capital of all believing Christians. Since the latter notion seems to have been widespread in the Christian world at the time of the Revelation of John⁴⁹⁷ it seems perfectly plausible that it would reappear precisely at a time when the power of the Roman empire was waning, as it was in the seventh century.⁴⁹⁸ In this context, the building of the Dome of the Rock would merely have symbolised the fall of one secular power (the Roman) rather than the rise of a new spiritual one (the Islamic).

It lies near at hand to reconsider Heraclius’ entry to Jerusalem, his symbolical devotion to the cross and his change of imperial titles, and question whether his program of restoring Roman peace had failed due to an unbridgeable division in historical expectations

⁴⁹⁴ In a lecture held in Vienna 1930 (“Der sechste Deutsche Orientalistentag in Wien, 10. bis 14 juni 1930), which is summed up in *Byzantion* 5:1930.

⁴⁹⁵ Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodios: A Concept of History” 161-4, 181, and *ibid.*, “Heraclius, the new Alexander”. Such legends seems to have left traces in Islamic tradition as well (Alexander, *op. cit.* 57.) Cf. the depiction of the Negus as one of the six kings in Qusayr ‘Amra.

⁴⁹⁶ Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodios: A Concept of History” 174f., Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* 152ff. Note that the Qur’an 18:83 mentions a man who once imprisoned Gog and Magog beyond a great wall: he is traditionally identified with Alexander the great. In the subsequent *ayāt*, it is foreseen that (*peoples*) ... *will fall upon each other like breaking waves* when God tears down the wall. According to classical tradition, Alexander was also planning a campaign against the Arabs when he fell sick and died in Babylon in 323 BC.

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. *Revelation* 18 and 21; the identification of Rome with the “Babylonian whore” is a topic in Evangelical polemics still as of today.

⁴⁹⁸ Again, it might be worth quoting Olster (*Roman Defeat, Christian Response* 99) on Sophronius: “he offered hope by disassociating the empire from the Christian community and creating a new Christian identity that was Roman no longer”. That violent anti-Judaism would make a comeback in the Christian communities at a time when the Roman imperial idea was disbanded seems to go hand in hand with the eschatological expectations.

between the Near East interiors and the Mediterranean world.⁴⁹⁹ But the impact of Pseudo-Methodius far outside his east Syrian homeland seems to be so considerable that the answer must lie in time as well as in space. The Greek translation of Pseudo-Methodius molds the “Greek king” into a “Roman emperor”,⁵⁰⁰ yet clearly emphasises his “Christian” purpose, and in the Latin writings based upon this translation, the emperor turns into a kind of Crusader who comes to force all Jews and Pagans to baptism, echoing the religious rather than secular policies of Heraclius.⁵⁰¹ Other apocalyptic works deducing their origin from Pseudo-Methodius – most notably the Slavonic *Visions of Daniel* dateable to 827-9 – refer to Constantinople as the city with “seven hills” in order to associate it with the old Rome and Babylon, the two enemies of Jerusalem.⁵⁰² Finally, Liutprand of Cremona, who visited Constantinople during the reign of the Byzantine “proto-crusader” Nicephorus Phocas, claimed that the Byzantine offensives into Arab territory were inspired by a Greek version of the same work, that was widespread among the Arabs as well, and which had foreseen a turn of the fortune towards the emperor.⁵⁰³ In the same source also appears the prediction that the Byzantines will only subdue the Arabs with help from the West.⁵⁰⁴ This would again put the concept of “holy war” – now referring to the Crusades – within an apocalyptic context.⁵⁰⁵

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. 1.1.1. and Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser”.

⁵⁰⁰ Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* 54f. It includes whole passages from the anti-Jewish disputations ascribed to Athanasius of Sinai.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 156. Quite ironical since many contemporary as well as later Christians condemned him for sacrificing Christian Orthodoxy for the sake of Roman unity.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 66 and n20. Compare the words of the Slavonic *Visions of Daniel*: ... *the Roman empires ... will rise up in the last days ... Woe to thee, Babylon of the Seven Hills ...* with the Yemenite Jew Ka’b at ‘Umars entry to the Temple mount in Jerusalem (1.1.3): *God sent a prophet to Constantinople, who stood on its hills and said: “O Constantinople! What did your kinsmen do to My house? They laid it waste, and made you its equal instead ... One day, I will make you barren.*

⁵⁰³ Liutprand, *Relatio de Legatione* 39: *habent Greci et Saraceni libros, quos ὀράσεις, sive visiones, Danielis vocant ... Legitur itaque huius Nicephori temporibus Assyrios Grecis non posse resistere huncque septennio tantum vivere. Cf. the quotation on the “Misfortunate one” (1.1.1) who according to Muslim tradition – before Nicephorus Phocas and Liutprand – would be the first “Roman” after Heraclius to enter Syria.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 40, as derived from the saying that the “lion and the cub together will destroy the wild donkey” (λέων καὶ σκίμνος ὁμοδιώξουσιν ὄναγρον); but Liutprand gives this a totally different meaning, suggesting that it is in fact the Western rulers, the emperor Otto and his crown prince Otto, who will destroy the donkey Nicephorus.

⁵⁰⁵ Cf. Brandes, “Liutprand von Cremona” 443ff.

The reason for this shift in Christian conceptualisations need not be discussed here. Instead, we shall note some points of convergence between the apocalyptic tradition of Pseudo-Methodius and Muslim apocalypses, for which Syria was a main breeding-ground as well.⁵⁰⁶ Taking the suggestion of Cook, not so much that there was a cross-pollination in traditions, as that the seventh century was generally marked by eschatological expectations,⁵⁰⁷ it would be interesting to suggest that some historical events, mirrored in such a perspective, became a core topic of later apocalyptic subcultures. *Both* Christian and Muslim apocalyptic traditions contain the notion that the Arab invasions are part of a Divine program leading up to the end of the world:⁵⁰⁸ just as the Muslim tradition makes the Arab conquests into a religious issue, so Byzantine tradition gives the Christians a meaningful justification of their humble acceptance of the conquests. For the Arabs, the fall of the Roman world meant the punishment of a godless world, for the Christians it was the proof that the Roman world *was* godless.⁵⁰⁹ The two contrahents take the roles of two players in a common game that follows a structure confirmed by them both:

- 1) The Roman world is sinful and corrupt.
- 2) The Arabs have been sent to punish it for its sins.
- 3) After the fall of Rome, Antichrist will arise and the real battle of Good and Evil can take place.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 71-73, 77, cf. 326.

⁵⁰⁷ Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius: A Concept of History" 186-7, sees the Arabic conquests as the very reason for Byzantine apocalypses. But the Qur'an, mirroring a general disbelief in the stability of the world, precedes the invasions. As Horden and Purcell notes in their chapter on catastrophes (*The Corrupting Sea* 298-320) earthquakes, floods and a complex ecological situation makes the Mediterranean an unstable and frightening world, and terrifying signs were hardly lacking in the desert either: Cook emphasises (*Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 273n) that Halley's comet appeared (one of its brightest appearances, according to the homepage of NASA) in 607, shortly before Muhammad (sometimes known as "the Warner") began his mission.

⁵⁰⁸ Bashear, "Early Muslim Apocalyptic Materials".

⁵⁰⁹ Zoroastrian tradition, so intimately connected to the Sassanian elite, could not take a Christian stance to the fall of their own empire, but the martyrdom of Husayn at Karbala afterwhile became a popular symbol of the evil of the worldly 'Umayyad empire in Iran. Mo'men, *Shi'i Islam* 33.

⁵¹⁰ This is basically the eschatological structure of *Rev.* 17-22 where the "great Babylon" is first thrown into the sea due to her abundance of sins, whereupon a white horseman appears to judge and conquer the peoples and Satan is bound for a thousand years before gathering the people of Gog and Magog to the grande finale.

This is not said to imply that Muslims and Christians were acting out of mutual consent or driven by some sado-masochistic feelings for each other (it would require a hardcore Freudian to believe in such a collective power of the libido).⁵¹¹ What these traditions might indicate is that *some* Christian and *some* Muslim observers identified the earthly reality – what the Arabs call *dunya* –⁵¹² with the earthly empires whose symbols of power they were confronted with everywhere, most prominently the Roman. The first point, then, could be described as a common rejection of “this world”: Arabs and non-Arabs would both come to the conclusion that the Roman empire was doomed by God because it represented “this world”, futile and conflicting, as opposed to the next, pure and everlasting world.

The second point might be somewhat more complicated to follow. Pseudo-Methodius clearly considers the new Arab rule as sinful as the fallen Roman one, and from a Muslim point of view, this would hardly be flattering to the *muğāhidun*. But here one must make another differentiation. As was touched upon earlier in this work, the Arab conquest meant a challenge to pious Muslims as well: now they were vulnerable to the same worldly temptations that had caused God to take his hand from the Romans and the Christians, another parallel to the fate of the Jews in the Old testament.⁵¹³ In some Muslim apocalypics, the collapse of Rome and Persia are part of the “temptations” of the *fitnas*, and in the long run, the Muslim warrior will run the risk of being absorbed by the world he tried to vanquish.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹¹ As Liutprand knew, the Muslim tradition contains as much the notion that the Romans will start some kind of a reconquista before the decisive battle. An example can be quoted here: *The Messenger of God said: The Hour will not come before the Romans will land at A'maq or Dabiq. An army consisting of the best men of Medina will go out to meet them ... They will fight, and a third will die fleeing – God will never forgive them – and a third, the best of martyrs for God, will die fighting, and a third, which will not give in, will win victory and conquer Rome. But when they share the booty ... Satan will tell them: “Antichrist has come”. Then they will go out again in vain and come to Syria ... but Jesus, son of Mary (pbuh) will come to lead them in prayer. Beholding him, the enemy of God will dissolve out of shame like salt in water.* Muslim, *Saḥīḥ* 39:9 (pII:360).

⁵¹² Meaning, “this world”, the world at hand as opposed to the “other world”, the eternal one. It can be used to denote worldly pleasures as well.

⁵¹³ Who many times fell for the temptation of being absorbed by the peoples they conquered, worshipping their gods and assuming their habits, everything of which was promptly condemned by their prophets.

⁵¹⁴ Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 6, 22, 40, cf. 72. This seems to be echoed in the way “temptations” by foreign women were described in popular traditions; cf. el Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* 123ff.

The third point would put the pieces of this puzzle together. After the fall of Rome – the last of the world empires –⁵¹⁵ the Muslim apocalypticist expects precisely that *not* to happen which the ‘Umayyads actually did let happen: he awaits not the establishment of an earthly Islamic empire, but the coming of the *Dağğal* (Antichrist) and the ensuing fight under the leadership of Jesus, who, according to some traditions, will descend to earth via the southern minaret of the Great mosque in Damascus.⁵¹⁶ As has been noted above, neither does the humble Christian expect a lasting restoration of the *Pax Romana*, but a miraculous saviour-warrior who is going to transfer all power to God in Jerusalem and prepare for the final battle with Gog and Magog. “Christ has not come to send peace, but a sword”:⁵¹⁷ at this point, any sympathies or antipathies for or against Roman and Arab rule are pointless, since these worldly empires are not expected to last. What matters is who is with God or not, and interestingly this does not seem to have been any reason for Pseudo-Methodius to engage in anti-Muslim polemics, proving that he, just like the other non-Muslim eyewitnesses, did not understand the Arab rulers as spiritual, but as “physical” enemies.⁵¹⁸

One might raise an objection to these interpretations by the fact that the Muslim historical and apocalyptic tradition is as late in date, narrow in observation and complex in nature as is the Byzantine, and that it hardly suffices to pick out those traditions which eventually seem to fit together with other ones. But there are practical implications in these traditions insofar as they mirror popular feelings which the centralising regimes would have

⁵¹⁵ After the Arabian kingdoms and Persia, which had already fallen to the Muslim Arabs, though the “six kings” (1.1.4) would indicate that other enumerations were also possible.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 173. Or, as seems to have been with apocalyptic expectations at the time of the Abbasid revolution, that the Caliphs will hand over their power to Jesus (323f).

⁵¹⁷ *Matth.* 10:34. Note that this is said in the same speech to the apostles where Jesus tells them to go out and warn the people of Israel for the immediately approaching Day of Judgement (“οὐ μὴ τελέσητε τὰς πόλεις Ἰσραὴλ ἕως ἔλθῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου”: 10:5f, 15, 21f, 23).

⁵¹⁸ Kaegi suggested (“Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest”) that Pseudo-Methodius foresaw coming Christian apostasy to Islam, and it is true that he warns his Christian fellows for leaving their faith for the sake of the Arabs; but he makes it appear as a vile longing to partake in, not the faith, but the godless *behaviour* of the Arab rulers. As will be noted later on (1.3.4) this would have been the natural way to define Islam at a time when it was an exclusively Arab faith. The “False Prophet” of the *Revelation*, though frequently used as a polemical epithet for Muhammad in later Christian writings, and mentioned in a verse quoted by Pseudo-Methodius, is *not* used by the latter to describe Islam: the author was obviously not fearing protelyzing Muslims, but Arab warriors, and the designation of a Beast would have seemed much more proper.

had to count with.⁵¹⁹ For instance, there seems to have been a widespread rumour that the Roman capital would only fall to a caliph with the name of a prophet.⁵²⁰ Admittedly, many such “prophecies” were embellished after the Ottoman conquest, as the city had actually fallen to a man with the name of a prophet.⁵²¹ Yet the seventh-century Arab expeditions to Constantinople have left some early traces in Muslim and Christian popular history alike.⁵²² The most famous example is the story about Abu Ayyoub Ansari, one of the companions of the Prophet, who is said to have personally embarked on expeditions to Constantinople and to have died at its gates during the sieges of 670-4:⁵²³

He completed his life the year when Yazid bin Mu‘awyah raided Constantinople during the caliphate of his father, Mu‘awyah. They buried him at the base of a fortress in Constantinople, in Roman soil. They say that the Romans use to take care of his tomb, renovate it and pray there for rain in times of drought.⁵²⁴

The message contained in this report appears to be that there was a pro-Muslim subculture among the Romans who hoped for the fall of the city to the Arabs. A more cautious interpretation, that will be pursued here, is that Arab warriors who penetrated the Roman empire were regarded as people with superhuman powers. Similarly, Muslim apocalypics contain the notion that at the walls of Constantinople, the Arabs would be faced by an enormous 12-year-old heir to the dynasty of Heraclius who would miraculously drive them off and start a Roman *reconquista*.⁵²⁵ Finally, one might consider the stories about the “Greek fire”, which was reportedly invented by a Roman scientist who had fled from the Arabs in Syria or Egypt, and which was used to destroy the Arab fleet during the sieges of 670-4.⁵²⁶ The military significance of “Greek fire” – which became the legendary “secret weapon” of

⁵¹⁹ Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State* 28f.

⁵²⁰ Eisener, *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion* 129.

⁵²¹ Necipoglu, “Hagia Sophia after Byzantium” 198-202. Most Arabic traditions are as late as Suyuti (d. 1506).

⁵²² See Canard, “Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople”, for the most comprehensive analysis.

⁵²³ Cf. for instance also Ya‘qubi, *Tārīḥ* II:285 or Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma‘ārif* 284.

⁵²⁴ (wa-)tawfī ‘āma ġazā Yazīdu ‘ibnu Mu‘āwiyata l-Qusṭantīniyata fī ḥilāfati ‘abīhi Mu‘āwiyata wa-qabruhū bi-‘aṣli ḥiṣni l-Qusṭantīniyata bi-‘arḍi r-Rūmi fa-r-Rūmu fihā dukri yata‘ahidūna qubrihi wa-yarummūnahā wa-yustasiqūna bihī ‘iḍan qahīṭū. Tabari, *Tārīḥ* III:2324, Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt al-kubri* III:485.

⁵²⁵ Bashear, “Early Muslim Apocalyptic Materials” 176; cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 334.

⁵²⁶ Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6165.

the Byzantines for centuries –⁵²⁷ is often considered too good to be true; its effect was probably first and foremost psychological, which of course does not diminish its actual importance.⁵²⁸ A fire-sprouting Roman emperor might well have calmed down eschatological expectations among both Christians and Muslims,⁵²⁹ and possibly also ignited a certain interest among the caliphs to learn chemistry.⁵³⁰

The interpretations of Muslim and Byzantine apocalypics presented in this paragraph should stay on a general level; first, because they are based only upon a small part of the vast apocalyptic literature, and secondly, because the point here is not to look for single political tendencies among the apocalypticists. The idea presented here is rather that common eschatological expectations could explain common themes and features in both apocalyptic traditions, that, in the end, would also have affected the way in which Constantinople and Damascus tried to reach out to their subjects. The real difference in perspectives, then, would lie between people who saw it as their explicit goal to become masters of the *dunya*, and people who, by contrast, despaired of meaning in this world and hoped for an indestructible Paradise in the next.⁵³¹ However, as has also been stated in a previous chapter, the border between the two paradises is not always entirely clear.

1.3.3. The “First Fall of Constantinople”

What do you say now, destroyer Ismael and all-eater?
Christ has the strength to save,
He governs everything as God and ruler,

⁵²⁷ Ellis Davidson, “The Secret Weapon of Byzantium” 61f, 66ff.

⁵²⁸ See Haldon, “‘Greek fire’ revisited” for a modern-day reconstruction of the weapon.

⁵²⁹ Cf. Karlin-Hayter, “Une allusion au feu grégeois dans le Synaxaire”.

⁵³⁰ Khalid bin Yazid, the young brother of Mu‘awiya II (683-4) who is reported by Baladhuri (*Futūḥ al-Buldān* 283) to have advised ‘Abd al-Malik on the first Islamic coinage in 691-2, is also stated by Tabari (*Tārīḥ* II:429) to have been an alchemist. Ibn al-Nadim repeatedly refers to him in the *Fihrist* as “the wise man of the house of Marwan” who at an early stage saw the need to collect books and knowledge from the conquered peoples.

⁵³¹ Again, Cook has summed it up best when he wrote: “People who believe that the end of the world is near, will not, for example, build beautiful mosques and buildings ...” Consequently, with the establishment of Islamic empires “the apocalypse was pushed out of history, as it were, into the deeper eschatological future, in order to help establish a stable government and religious system that would not be dependant upon revolutionaries for their legitimacy.” *Studies in Muslim Apocalypics* 325.

He provides the power and forces the battle,
He shatters the arrows and breaks the lives of the mighty.⁵³²

A century after its rise to power, in 711, the dynasty of Heraclius met its fate in a revolution that brutally made off not only with the nose-less Justinian II, but even with his six-year-old son Tiberios.⁵³³ It was followed by a severe crisis in government in which three emperors replaced each other within six years: Bardanes or Philippicus (711-713), an Armenian Monothelete who caused a religious row but proved unable to deal with the acute Bulgar threat to the capital; Artemius or Anastasius II (713-715), a civil servant who lost the support of the Opsikian troops that had made him emperor, and finally Theodosius III (715-717), a poor customs officer in Ephesos who was declared emperor in spite of his vehement protests but however managed to reconcile the Bulgars.⁵³⁴ Meanwhile, with the Muslim centennial approaching, the caliph al-Walid died and was – though this was a subject of dispute –⁵³⁵ succeeded by his younger brother Sulayman,⁵³⁶ giving the Muslims, for the first time, a caliph with the name of a prophet.⁵³⁷ Interestingly, Sulayman is also known as Abu Ayyoub after his first son, Ayyoub, whom he now tried to appoint as his successor.⁵³⁸ Whether motivated by this or by the political confusion in Constantinople, Sulayman launched what became the

⁵³² Τί φης, ἀλάστορ Ἰσμαήλ καὶ παμφάγε; Ἔχει σθένος ὁ Χριστὸς εἰς σωτηρίαν· κρατεῖ δὲ ἀπάντων ὡς θεὸς καὶ δεσπότης· δίδωσιν ἰσχὺν καὶ κρατύνει πρὸς μάχην, θραύει τε τόξα καὶ τρίβει ζῶντα κράτη. Theodosios Grammatikos, *Hypo ton Arabon deutera poliorkia tis Konstantinoupoleos* 132.

⁵³³ Who was *slaughtered like a sheep*, according to Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6203.

⁵³⁴ Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 153-5, Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 93f.

⁵³⁵ It seems that al-Hajjaj feared a change of policy under Sulayman and tried to have Walid change the traditional order of inheritance between the brothers; however, he died before anything could be undertaken. Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* 74 (who suggests that Sulayman forebodes the important conceptual break in the reign of ‘Umar II).

⁵³⁶ Cf. Tabari *Tārīḥ* II:1274ff.

⁵³⁷ Sulayman = Solomon, who is recognised as a prophet in Islam. Eisener, *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion* 129. By contrast to his brother Walid, for whom ‘Abd al-Malik had too weak a heart to send him away for being schooled in the language of the nomads, Sulayman is said to have spoken perfect Arabic (*ibid.*, 11f). A later Basran tradition, which is also quoted by Tabari, illustrates the character of Sulayman with a disgusting anecdote in which the caliph makes a whole company of Arabic poets – among them the famous al-Farazdaq – joke and jest and declaim verses as they are cutting down defenceless Roman prisoners of war (*ibid.*, 179-183).

⁵³⁸ Even this effort failed; Ayyoub died within a year and the other sons of Sulayman were too young to inherit the power. But Sulayman found another way to circumvent his father’s wish that the caliphate should be continuously inherited among the brothers, by giving it to a cousin, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Aziz (see below, 1.3.4).

most thorough Arab campaign ever for conquering the Roman capital, both by land and by sea, under the leadership of his brother Maslama.⁵³⁹ Just as a hundred years before when Heraclius came to power, Constantinople was thus under immediate threat from two directions, though Avars and Persians had been replaced by Bulgars and Arabs.

What now happened is exceedingly obscure. According to Theophanes, the general Sulayman bin Mu'ad reached Amorion, which he tried to win by a combination of siege and flatter of its *strategos*, whom he called emperor, causing those in the city to do the same.⁵⁴⁰ The *strategos* – as it becomes apparent later on – was known as Leo and had recently been appointed *strategos* over the Anatolikon theme by Anastasios II, which motivated him to side with the Armeniakon *strategos* Artabasdos against the Opsikian troops that had made Theodosius III emperor.⁵⁴¹ On the background of Leo, two main opinions have always stood against each other: the first one, which became the predominant Byzantine one, claims that he was an Isaurian, from southern Anatolia, whereas the other one, more widespread in the Near East, claims that he was a Syrian.⁵⁴² Of more importance in an era when the border between ethnical and geographical origin is so muddled⁵⁴³ is probably the question of his topographic origin, which is said to be Germanikeia, or Marash, even in the sources that call him an Isaurian.⁵⁴⁴ This city lies on what for centuries would be the border between the Muslim and Byzantine world; if Leo also grew up there, he would have experienced at least some years of Muslim presence, or in any case lived in a milieu where Roman authority was weak.⁵⁴⁵ What might be the most important fact in his biography is unknown: why he made his fortune in

⁵³⁹ See Guiland, *Études byzantines* 109-33 and Canard, “Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople” for a comparative approach to these chronologies.

⁵⁴⁰ Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6208. ἤρξαντο οἱ Σαρακηνοὶ εὐφημεῖν τὸν στρατηγὸν Λέοντα βασιλέα, παρακαλοῦντες καὶ τοὺς ἔσω τὸ αὐτὸ ποιεῖν. ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ τοῦ Ἀμωρίου, ὅτι οἱ Σαρακηνοὶ πόθῳ αὐτὸν εὐφήμουν, εὐφήμησαν καὶ αὐτοί.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, AM 6209.

⁵⁴² Schenk, “Kaiser Leons Walten im Innern”, Head, “Who was the Real Leo the Isaurian?” Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* 1-12, opted for the latter interpretation but it is still much debated. The eighth-century *Parastaseis* refers to him as an Isaurian.

⁵⁴³ Cf. the lectures of F. Mitthof, J. Retsö and M. Meier at the “Visions of Community” symposium in Vienna, 17-20 June 2009, which are due to be published. – Leo is referred to as a “Nabatean” in some Arabic legends, a designation which seems to be as unclear as that of an “Isaurian”.

⁵⁴⁴ Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6209.

⁵⁴⁵ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the reign of Leo III* 25-31.

Roman – or Christian – lands instead of in the caliphate.⁵⁴⁶ What is clear from any point of observation is that, becoming a man of influence even in the pluralistic Roman milieu, he was sometimes – though it is not exactly stated how – perceived as a stranger, who took the name Leo (Leon) in order to cover up the more xenophonic name Konon.⁵⁴⁷ During the 716-17 events, he won support from inner Anatolia when he was hailed as emperor by the Amorians, or by the Arabs, or both, though it remains unclear why the latter would be the case.

Muslim historical tradition has been keen to depict it as if Leo tricked the Arab commanders into supporting him.⁵⁴⁸ According to them, Maslamas was personally received in Amorion by Leo, who had already been in contact with Sulayman and advised him on the expedition.⁵⁴⁹ Those traditions stress the notion that Leo spoke Arabic fluently and stood closer to the Arabs than to the people he represented, and the most fanciful reports make him the unofficial hero of stories in which he is fooling the wits out of Maslamas.⁵⁵⁰ It is of course likely that Muslim tradition tried to play down the fact that Leo emerged as the victor in the race for Constantinople; which, on the other hand, does not make the equally hostile Byzantine reports a more reliable source for what really happened.⁵⁵¹ As far as the chronology is concerned, it seems that with or without the support from Maslama, Leo first marched to Bithynia, where he took the son of Theodosius III hostage and used him for negotiating an abdication from the emperor, whereupon he entered Constantinople and was crowned on the 25 March 717, the day of the Annunciation.⁵⁵² Some months later, Maslama appeared at the Bosphorus together with the Arab fleet and was turned off by Leo. He started a siege, but “the

⁵⁴⁶ Gero here also disavows the report of Theophanes, that Leo, having been deported to Thrace in early years, gained prominence after he had sent 500 sheep to Justinian II (Ibid, 31).

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 13-24. This is yet another controversy connected to the “Isaurian” problem. Leontius (695-8) had been of Isaurian origin, whereas Leo II (474) was the son of the Isaurian Zeno whom Leo I had liased himself to. The suggestion of Rydén (“The Role of the Icon in Byzantine Piety” 48f n39) than Konon is only a word-play of *(ei)konon*, sounds a bit fanciful to me – it would be equivalent to claim that his epithet is derived from *(i)sauros*, a Greek word denoting lizards, serpents and other reptiles. On his short-lived triumph over Leontius and his follower Apsimar in 705, Justinian II made a similar pun out of the names of his two opponents, as he let the public declaim *Ps* 91:13 “You shall trample upon lions and dragons”.

⁵⁴⁸ Cf. the *Decisive Moments in the History of Islam* by Muhammad Abdullah ‘Inan – the English translation of an Arabic original which has been widely sold throughout the 20th century – 35f.

⁵⁴⁹ Tabari *Tārīḥ* II:1316. (Tabari seems to believe that Theodosius III died before Leo set out to Constantinople.)

⁵⁵⁰ Cf. the 11th century *Kitāb al-‘uyūn wa-l-ḥadā’iq* 24-33.

⁵⁵¹ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* 34.

⁵⁵² Theophanes *Chronographia* AM 6209.

pious emperor” sent “fire-sprouting ships” against the “wagers of war upon Christ”.⁵⁵³ At this point, the caliph Sulayman himself decided to join the campaign, but died suddenly, aged 42.⁵⁵⁴ After a harsh winter, Maslama either – depending on tradition – capitulated to Leo, or offered Leo to end the siege if the emperor granted him a triumphal entry into the city.⁵⁵⁵ What both traditions seems to confirm is that the first mosque was built in Constantinople as a consequence of Maslama visiting the city.⁵⁵⁶ The siege then was lifted on 15 August 718, the Dormition, the other main Feast day of the *Theotokos*, which would correspond to the 13 of muharram (the first month) in the Islamic year 100. Even without legendary embellishments, it is clearly a series of extraordinary events.

If the true facts of the 717-18 events are indiscernable, some interesting aspects of the narratives should at least be noted. First, it seems that Muslim tradition transforms an ‘Umayyad defeat – actually the fatal turning-point of the whole ‘Umayyad caliphate –⁵⁵⁷ into a major victory for Islam, as the first mosque in Constantinople is now founded to serve Arab prisoners of war there. Byzantine and Orthodox historical tradition, which is hostile to Leo,⁵⁵⁸ similarly transforms the 717-18 events into a major Christian victory of the Virgin Mary, ignoring the more basic military facts, such as the decisive role which the non-Christian Bulgars played by siding with Constantinople and driving off the Arabs.⁵⁵⁹ Gero suggested that Armenian and Monophysite sources have preserved a picture of Leo that is closer to the original Byzantine one, and which had strong Christian overtones.⁵⁶⁰ In these sources – in some kind of reversal of the Pseudo-Methodian scenario – Leo appears as a saviour-warrior from the east, who comes to deliver Constantinople by reviving its Christian mission to the world.⁵⁶¹ The new Rome has, so to say, turned into a new Jerusalem, and classical references that had applied to Heraclius have been replaced by biblical types: Leo is a new Moses who

⁵⁵³ Ibid. Sulayman is called *χριστομάχος*; Leo is *εὐσεβής*. Cf. below.

⁵⁵⁴ Tabari, *Tārīḥ* II:1337. There seem to have been some notion of nemesis on the career of Sulayman, as he is priding himself with royal robes and admiring his manly reflection in the mirror immediately before he dies.

⁵⁵⁵ Muqaddasi, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm* III:147.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.; cf. *De Administrando Imperio* 97, and Canard, “Les expéditions Arabes contre Constantinople” 94ff.

⁵⁵⁷ Gibb, “Arab-Byzantine Relations” 59-61.

⁵⁵⁸ The most obvious example being Theophanes himself, who in AM 6211, two years after the abovementioned description of the “pious” emperor who defended the city, now refers to him as the “impious” emperor.

⁵⁵⁹ Gjuzelev, *Medieval Bulgaria* 105-9.

⁵⁶⁰ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* 36-43.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 132-217, for a full survey of these traditions.

prays together with the clergy and the inhabitants of the city and sinks the Muslim fleet by touching the Bosphorus with the Cross. What is nowhere stated, though it seems almost necessary to make it explicit, is that the Arabs had set out to conquer the Roman capital, but found themselves as Muslims meeting resistance from a Christian stronghold.

Due to the general bias of the sources, there is very little one can say for sure about Leo, but at least one official document offers a first-hand insight into his world: the *Ecloga*, his later⁵⁶² contribution to the Law of Justinian I. Nowhere in Roman jurisprudence has the Divine nature of law been stated so explicitly as in the *Ecloga*, which begins with an invocation of the Holy Trinity and then famously goes on to declare Christian love for mankind as the reason why offenders should be burned, hanged, blinded or have their noses slit, tongues cut or hands chopped off.⁵⁶³ In fact – as the seventh century events clearly show – these punishments had already been practised for a long time in the empire. What is new is that they are now motivated by religious arguments and supported by Scripture:

The Ruler and Creator of every thing, our God, who made Man and marked him with honour, gave him, as the Prophet says, the Law as a help to know what he should do and what he should not do: the former will lead him to salvation, and the latter will cause him to be punished ... For it is God who has proclaimed both, and the power of His words will ... as it is said in the Gospels, never pass away.⁵⁶⁴

This is not said to revive the old simplification that the appearance of Leo brought dramatic changes to the empire; we have repeatedly stated that it is impossible to look for historical intentionality in an unruly era.⁵⁶⁵ When Leo had his son and heir baptised some year later, he

⁵⁶² On the dating of the *Ecloga*, see the edition of Burgmann 10-12.

⁵⁶³ Gregory, “The Ekloga of Leo III and the Concept of Philanthropia” esp. 269f, 275ff.

⁵⁶⁴ δεσπότης καὶ ποιητὴς τῶν ἀπάντων Θεὸς ἡμῶν, ὁ κτίσας τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ τιμήσας αὐτὸν τῇ αὐτεξουσιότητι, νόμον αὐτῷ κατὰ τὸ προφητικῶς εἰρημένον δεδωκὼς εἰς βοήθειαν πάντα αὐτῷ τὰ τε πρακτέα καὶ ἀπευκταῖα δι᾽ αὐτοῦ κατέστησε γνώριμα, τὰ μὲν αἰρεῖσθαι ὡς σωτηρίας ὑπάρχοντα πρόψενα, τὰ δὲ ἀπωθεῖσθαι ὡς κολάσεως αἷτια: ... Θεὸς γὰρ ὁ προεπαγγελιάμενος τὰ ἀμφοτέρω, οὐ τῶν λόγων ἢ δύναμις ... κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγελικῶς εἰρημένον οὐ παρελεύσεται. Leo III, *Ecloga* I 11-20. As Gregory says, the “philanthropy” could be easily explained from verses such as Matt. 5:29f, which states that it is better for a man to tear out his eye than to go to hell: this would possibly also justify a *lex talionis* similar to that known from the later Islamic schools of law.

⁵⁶⁵ In an obvious example of *vaticinium ex eventu*, Theophanes makes it appear as if everybody had been unaware of Leo’s “true” nature until it was too late: when the patriarch Germanos heard that the new emperor’s

named him Constantine, in what he himself probably regarded as a fully legitimate way of affirming both Roman and Christian continuity in the imperial office, and there is no reason to assume that he lacked popular support in this concern.⁵⁶⁶ However, to say that the “Leo paradigm” is a mere literary after-construction would be to deny the fact that the literary Leo incorporates a multitude of characteristics that are traceable already in the seventh century changes.⁵⁶⁷ With Leo, the transformation in universalist ideals from Heraclius seems to come full circle: imperial Christianity has been replaced by a Christian empire, the universal peace-emperor has been transformed into a local warrior-saviour and Jerusalem rather than Rome now seems to be its spiritual capital.⁵⁶⁸ Independent of Islam, this inner process offers an interesting mirror to the contemporary changes in what would become the Islamic world.

Tabari retells an intriguing story from the first meeting of the Arab troops with Leo. Scorning the caliph who “fills his stomach with whatever he finds”,⁵⁶⁹ Leo receives the answer that Muslims are expected to obey their leaders. His own reply sounds ironical:

“You are right ... Before, we used to fight each other because of faith ... but now, we fight each other because of royal prestige.”⁵⁷⁰

Unless Leo puts himself on par with Sulayman, the meaning must be that the Muslim warriors could no more claim religious legitimacy for their conquests, since the latter were only benefiting an unsatable Arab kingdom “of this world”.

Christian tradition would brand the iconoclast supporters of Leo as “Arab wolves”, which is unfair to the Arabs.⁵⁷¹ However, even if religious bias against the “Arab”

name was, in fact, Konon, he was struck by fear, recalling a prophecy that the destruction of icons would come by through an emperor of this name (*Chronographia* AM 6221).

⁵⁶⁶ Typically, this was also the very occasion that was later held *against* Constantine V: the post-iconoclastic Byzantine historians could simply not reconcile themselves with the fact that what they considered as an anomaly of an emperor had been named Constantine, and so had to distinguish the *Kopronymos* (“shit-name”) Constantine from all the other Constantines by recalling an embarrassing mishap at the baptismal font.

⁵⁶⁷ As Patricia Crone noted in “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm” 63: “if before they had been Hellenizing, they were now likely to start Judaizing: and in fact that is precisely what happened.”

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. Masai, “La politique des Isauriens et la naissance de l’Europe”.

⁵⁶⁹ Sulayman was infamous for his gluttony.

⁵⁷⁰ *kunna taqātilu ʿalā d-dīn wa-naḡḡibu laha faʿimmā l-yawmi fā-inna taqātilu ʿalā l-galbatī wa-l-mulk.* Tabari, *Tārīḥ* II:1315.

⁵⁷¹ Mansi XIII III 75 2-4 Cf. below, 2.2.1.

emperor is a pure after-construction, one cannot exclude the existence of contemporary Constantinopolitan scepticism about the Anatolian *strategos* on a sociocultural level. Heraclius had met opposition in the east when he came from Carthage to claim the empire,⁵⁷² and inner Anatolia now brought Leo to power whereas the Opsikion theme at the Aegean coast opted for Theodosius III and rebelled against the Armenian Philippicus.⁵⁷³ The statement of Theophanes, that the “Arab-minded” Leo punished “by mutilation, scourging, banishment, and fines especially those who were distinguished by their birth and education”⁵⁷⁴ is not necessarily an example of iconoclasm; it could simply be an indication that the reign of Leo saw the definite loss of power in the very capital of the old Roman aristocracy that had been on the decline around the Mediterranean for a century.⁵⁷⁵ Dynastic allegiance would have made some people hope for a miraculous revival of the “legitimate” Heraclian family, and there is actually a curious report of a boy showing up in the Arab camp outside Constantinople and presenting himself as Tiberios, the son of Justinian II and the rightful inheritor of the Roman empire.⁵⁷⁶ In a certain twist of thought, this would make 717 the year when the Roman capital *had* actually fallen – to the Near Eastern Christian Leo.

Like his predecessors, Leo strongly stressed “Orthodoxy” throughout his reign, causing distress not only for Jews and heretics within the empire⁵⁷⁷ but – as his tragic legacy shows – for the Christians who were to write the history of his reign.⁵⁷⁸ Since he had also accepted a mosque to be built in Constantinople, it is logical that his *Ecloga* would be the first imperial source to acknowledge the existence of a Muslim faith as well. The paragraph

⁵⁷² Kaegi, “New evidence on the early reign of Heraclius” 308ff.

⁵⁷³ In Ephesus, a cult developed around the deposed Theodosius III (Foss, “Pilgrimage in Asia Minor” 140).

⁵⁷⁴ Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6218; cf. 1.3.2 and Mango, “Books in the Byzantine Empire” 45.

⁵⁷⁵ Meyendorff, “Observations on the Aristocracy in Byzantium” 3f.

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 334. The boy was dismissed, as he did not at all correspond to the supernatural way in which the Arabs had visualised him; cf. above (1.3.2).

⁵⁷⁷ Sharf, *Jews and Other Minorities in Byzantium* 109-18. Like the persecutions under Heraclius in Jerusalem a century before, this can be seen as a short and temporary outbreak of anti-judaism within Byzantine society; the interesting fact which Sharf points out is that the fatal connection this time was not with Persian society, but with the Montanists, who held Messianic beliefs in the establishment of a New Jerusalem led by the Paraclete spirit.

⁵⁷⁸ Once again, Leo does not so much represent a break in this concern as the fulfilment of a gradual development that had gone on from the very day when Constantine transformed the hated Pagan empire into a the saintly guardian of Christianity. Under his imperial garb, Justinian I had showed himself as a werewolf to Procopius (cf. 2.2.2) and we have already surveyed the falling popularity curve of the Heraclian dynasty. Leo, once in office, failed to become more than a new earthly king, just like his contemporaries in Damascus.

marked with the clarifying *pinax* “on those who become *Magars*” says that “those who are taken prisoners by the enemy and abjure our supreme Christian faith should, if they return, be turned to the jurisdiction of the Church”.⁵⁷⁹ The exceptional word “Magar”, which mainly occurs in the Syriac-transmitted works of Theophanes and his continuer, corresponds to the term (*mgharriye*) which the Near eastern sources used to distinguish the Muslim Arabs from Arabs in general.⁵⁸⁰ Though the distinction is not generally upheld in Byzantine sources, it seems clear from this point that two *faiths* rather than empires are facing each other.

1.3.4. A Question of Faith

In this year, after a big earthquake occurred in Syria, ‘Umar forbade the drinking of wine in the cities and forced Christians to turn *Magar*; and those who did turn *Magars*, he made free of taxes, but those who refused he killed, and many became martyrs. He also decreed that a Christian could not witness against an Arab. He even wrote a dogmatic letter to the emperor Leo, believing it would make him turn *Magar*.⁵⁸¹

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Aziz, who succeeded Sulayman during the siege of Constantinople, seems to have carried messianic expectations with him.⁵⁸² A nephew to ‘Abd al-Malik, he was perceived as an outsider in the family, an enemy to the imperial policies of al-Hajjaj that had dominated the reigns of ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Walid,⁵⁸³ and with a reputation for piety and asceticism that distinguished him from the worldly manners of his predecessors.⁵⁸⁴ Just as

⁵⁷⁹ Leo III, *Ecloga* 17.6, *pinax* 176: Οἱ ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων χειρωθέντες καὶ τὴν ἀμώμητον ἡμῶν τῶν χριστιανῶν πίστιν ἀπαρνησάμενοι ὑποστρέφοντες ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ παραπεμπέσθωσαν.

⁵⁸⁰ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 180.

⁵⁸¹ Τῷ δῆαυτῷ ἔτει σεισμοῦ μεγάλου γενομένου ἐν Συρίᾳ, ἐκάλυψεν Οὔμαρ τὸν οἶνον ἀπὸ τῶν οὐλεων, καὶ μαγαρίζειν τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ἠνάγκαζεν· καὶ τοὺς μὲν μαγαρίζοντας ἀτελεῖς ἐποίει, τοὺς δὲ μὴ καταδεχομένους ἀνήρει, καὶ πολλοὺς μάρτυρας ἀπειργάσατο, καὶ μὴ παραδέχεσθαι μαρτυρίαν Χριστιανοῦ κατὰ Σαρακηνοῦ ἐθέσπισεν. ἐποίησε δὲ καὶ ἐπιστολὴν δογματικὴν πρὸς Λέοντα τὸν βασιλέα οἰόμενος πείσειν αὐτὸν τοῦ μαγαρίσαι. Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6210.

⁵⁸² Crone, Hinds, *God's Caliph* 114.

⁵⁸³ Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* 76ff.

⁵⁸⁴ Tabari, *Tārīḥ* II:1363-72.

with Leo III, it is difficult to say what practical implications these characteristics would have had, but at least two groundbreaking changes in the history of Islam took place under his reign. He ended the aggressive expansionist politics pursued by his predecessors⁵⁸⁵ and started an inner process of Islamisation by two crucial means: by making Islam more accessible as well as attractive for non-Arab converts⁵⁸⁶ and by the repression of those who rejected this possibility.⁵⁸⁷ In short, the first official step from an Arabic empire towards an Islamic commonwealth took place at the very beginning of Leo's reign in Constantinople.

The parallelism between the two rulers should perhaps not be exaggerated. But it is almost impossible to ignore it, since Leo III and 'Umar II are attested in different traditions to have initiated the first official debate between Christianity and Islam.⁵⁸⁸ Some versions of the alleged letters are preserved, the fullest version in the history work of the Armenian Ghewond, which may contain some core parts from the early eighth century.⁵⁸⁹ Gaudeul has tried to reconstruct the letter of 'Umar II on the basis of two Arabic sources,⁵⁹⁰ whereas Hoyland argues for at least a possible Greek original for the "letter of Leo" found in Ghewond's work.⁵⁹¹ Jeffery also suggested that the original dialog might have taken place in Arabic, though Leo refers to "our Greek tongue".⁵⁹² It is of course very unlikely that Leo actually wrote the letter we have today, but the contents, as retold by Ghewond, are not at odds with what could have been written at the Constantinopolitan court during the early eighth century.⁵⁹³ In theme and style, the debate conforms with purported early dialogues that had taken place between Christian priests and Arab warlords in the conquered territories.⁵⁹⁴ What is unprecedented is its high-level political implications: if the exchange of letters took place it would confirm that the Constantinopolitan court claimed to defend *the whole* Christianity *as a faith* – an excursion from its mundane function which ought to be scrutinised.

⁵⁸⁵ Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State* 31-5.

⁵⁸⁶ Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* 86-92, 168.

⁵⁸⁷ Schick, *The Christian Communities in Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule*, 88f, 169f.

⁵⁸⁸ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 490-501.

⁵⁸⁹ Hoyland, "The Correspondence of Leo III and 'Umar II" 168f.

⁵⁹⁰ Gaudeul, "The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar".

⁵⁹¹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* loc. cit.

⁵⁹² Ghewond, transl. Jeffrey 297.

⁵⁹³ Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam" 125-129.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 459ff.

The dialogue, as retold by Ghewond, is initiated by the caliph. It could be interpreted as a deliberate repetition of what had happened a century before, when the Prophet had written to Heraclius in order to invite him to Islam with his famous words: *ʿaslim taslim*, “submit, and you will be in peace”. At that time, Heraclius is said to have stood on the height of his triumph over Persia. Nothing would have seemed more befitting to the caliph, after a century of continuous setbacks for the Roman empire that had culminated in the 717-18 siege, than to write a new letter and, so to say, remind the emperor of the unheeded warning. On the other hand, the letter of ‘Umar does not contain the braggings of a triumphant victor, but simply questions on the nature of the Christian religion. It is almost as if it had suddenly occurred to the caliph that Christianity in fact was a separate religion, not merely a corrupt version of his own Abrahamic faith:

There has often come over me a desire to know the teachings of your so imaginative religion, and to make a profound study of your beliefs ... So I pray you, tell me truly, why ... is it that you have not been willing to accept what Jesus Himself has said as to His person, but have preferred to make researches into the books of the Prophets and the Psalms, in order to find there testimonies to prove the incarnation of Jesus? This provides a reason for suspecting that you had doubts, and regarded as insufficient the testimony that Jesus bears to Himself ...⁵⁹⁵

Many arguments here are familiar from Muslim polemics against Christianity, but apart from the reference to Christianity as “imaginative” the tone of the letter seems to be honest and inquisitive rather than scornful and polemical. Of course one might ask why the caliph, surrounded as he was by Christians everywhere, should have regarded the Roman emperor as the most proper person to address. The problems which are intriguing the caliph are namely purely non-political and can be listed thus:⁵⁹⁶

- 1) Theological complications: the Trinity and how God can be a man, or a man can be God
- 2) Dubious practices and innovations, such as the veneration of saints and relics, of pictures and the “instrument of torture” (the cross)

⁵⁹⁵ Ghewond, transl. Jeffery 277.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 277-8.

- 3) Practical problems: how can the Christians be sure that the Bible is true and unfalsified if it has been handed down through hands they know nothing about, and why, if they are sure, is there such great discord among the Christian sects?
- 4) Logical inconsequences: why the Christians are struggling to find prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament while bypassing any possible prophecies pointing at Muhammad in the New, or why they acknowledge Jewish scriptures void of references to Judgment, Heaven and Hell, whereas they are rejecting Jewish documented customs such as circumcision, sacrifice and the sabbath
- 5) The lack of eschatology in the Bible

Especially the last point is interesting, suggesting that end-time expectations played a crucial role to Muslim convictions of the sixth and seventh centuries.

Leo's answer, as presented by Ghewond, is about fifty times as long as the letter of 'Umar, and it shows a certain disdain in its tone (the caliph is called both "a child" and "a liar" and many arguments begin with the upbraiding phrase "hearken and hear"), if it is not simply outraged ("I am much astonished, not only at your incredulity, but also at the manner in which, without a blush, you expose ideas which render you ridiculous").⁵⁹⁷ The emperor has already exchanged letters with 'Umar, it is said, "when necessity demands", in worldly affairs, but not in matters of Christian doctrine, "since our Lord and Master himself has bidden us refrain from exposing our unique and divine doctrine before heretics for fear it be turned into ridicule."⁵⁹⁸ Leo claims that he already has full knowledge of Islam: "we possess historical documents composed by our blessed prelates who were living at the same epoch as your legislator Muhammad" and refers to their revealed scripture.⁵⁹⁹ "we know that it was 'Umar, Abu Turab and Salman the Persian, who composed that, even though the rumor has got round among you that God sent it down from the heavens,"⁶⁰⁰ and suggests that the

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 286.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 282.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. The "Furqan", as he calls it, would actually mean "revelation" in Arabic and is thus no misreading, neither a deliberate pejorative. I am unsure about its meaning in Armenian texts.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 292.

imperialist al-Hajjaj replaced some Muslim scriptures with those of his own.⁶⁰¹

The details of the letter need not be scrutinised here. The main part of it is concerned with defending and explaining the Christian faith in detail and refuting accusations of corruption in its scripture or theology. Just as some of the arguments proposed by the caliph are recurring themes in Muslim polemics, so some of the arguments proposed by the emperor are commonplace in Christian apologetics. In order to defend the Trinity and double nature of God, he uses the common metaphor of the sun and its rays; in order to explain the crucifixion, he applies to the human nature of Jesus in Islam.⁶⁰² He promptly dismisses the reading of “Paraclete” as a prophecy of Muhammad (““Paraclete’ signifies ‘consoler,’ while Muhammad means ‘to give thanks,’ or ‘to render grace,’ a meaning which has no connection whatever with the word Paraclete”).⁶⁰³ Interestingly, he makes no outspoken efforts to convince the caliph of becoming a Christian, as if he considers ‘Umar unreceptive for such lofty thoughts. In particular, he stresses the Muslim misreadings of Christian scripture and doctrines as a sign that the caliph is not taking the debate seriously.

Most interesting, however, are those passages in which the alleged Leo defends Christian practises and habits, for it is in those parts that he also finds the opportunity to attack the religion of the caliph. Aside his defences of the Christian faith, he never makes any direct counter-attack against the *faith* of the Muslims; the emperor consequently refuses to meet the caliph on a theological level and ignores both what he refers to as the “legislator” (Muhammad) and the “Furqan” (the Qur’an) as barbarian fancies. He is well aware that the Arabs consider themselves as heirs to the faith of Abraham, and he misses no opportunity to remind them of what this should imply, as he describes the “marvellous” Christian theology at length. Actual attacks upon the Muslim Arabs, however, are based upon the following facts:

- 1) The Caliph says that the Christians are sectarians, but the Arabs, despite belonging to one nation, are already divided into a multitude of religious sects who are brutally fighting each other.⁶⁰⁴
- 2) The Christians, being civilised, no longer practise certain Jewish customs, whereas the Arabs are barbarians who pursue circumcision of

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 298.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 300, 314.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 293.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 295.

both males and females “in a time as modern as ours” [sic].⁶⁰⁵

- 3) Christian veneration of holy men and their relics is hardly a point of criticism for the Arabs, whose wars have caused so many good Christians to die for their faith.⁶⁰⁶
- 4) The Christians are no more idol-worshippers than are the Arabs, who venerate both the Ka’ba and the Black stone in a desert to which “Jesus Christ used to drive out many demons”.⁶⁰⁷
- 5) Worst of all, the Arabs indulge in carnal lusts with many women “as if it were a question of tilling fields”: “When you are tired of your wives, as of some kind of nourishment, you abandon them at your fancy ...before retaking your repudiated wives you make them sleep in the bed of another. And what shall I say of the execrable debauchery which you commit with your concubines?”⁶⁰⁸

Someone making a logical analysis of the correspondence might suspect the emperor of cheating;⁶⁰⁹ Leo himself has, after all, only defended Christianity in a spiritual sense of faith and religious practice; he does not try to defend what all people do who claim to be Christian.⁶¹⁰ Still, he holds the caliph responsible for habits, practices and behaviour of the Arabs which sometimes have a complicated role within Islam as well.⁶¹¹ Warfare, sectarianism, circumcision, polygamy and veneration of the Black stone in the Ka’ba were all practised by the Arabs before Islam; only the veneration of the Black stone in the Ka’ba is generally regarded as a central Muslim act of piety (and even as such it is defended by tradition in order

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 317.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 321.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 322f. This passage also contains a much-quoted *defence* of the veneration of images, which has often been put at odds with Leo’s later iconoclastic policies. See further 2.1. Note that the pre-islamic Arabs had worshipped gods in the form of stones, and that stones in Arab folklore sometimes are inhabited by *djinn*s.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 325f.

⁶⁰⁹ With a false form of argumentation discussed by Aristotle in his *Topica* (VIII:6).

⁶¹⁰ And typically, Leo explicitly distances himself from *all the voluptuous, impure, filthy, impious people who conduct themselves like pagans, and among whose number you count us. But these are people who disguise under the name of Christ their own abominations, giving themselves out to be Christians, but whose faith is only a blasphemy, and their baptism only a soiling.* (*Op. cit.* 297).

⁶¹¹ Hoyland, “The Correspondence of Leo III and ‘Umar II” 174f.

to avoid *Muslim* insinuations about Paganism).⁶¹² But one should remember that Islam in those days was still an exclusively Arab faith, for which conversion required the acceptance into a tribe and the adaptation of the values of the conquering elite.⁶¹³ Leo pinpoints the weakness in such a faith when he says that Christianity has spread to nations all over the world, and that no less than twelve peoples of different customs, habits and languages adhere to one divine faith, even if the caliph refuses to understand it.⁶¹⁴ The faith of the caliph, he stresses – raising doubts as to whether it is a faith at all – is only the belief of one single people that has spread by means of violence and tyranny, driven by personal greed and carnal lust. A viewpoint coherent with that of many non-Muslim observers to the Arab conquest is thus presented by the emperor as an open challenge to the Muslim leader:

You call ‘the Way of God’ these devastating raids which bring death and captivity to all peoples. Behold your religion and its recompence. Behold your glory, ye who pretend to live an angelic life. As for us, instructed in and convinced of the marvellous mystery of our redemption, we hope, after our resurrection, to enjoy the celestial kingdom, so we are submissive to the doctrines of the Gospel, and wait humbly for a happiness such that ‘eyes have never seen it, nor ears ever heard it, but which God has prepared for those who love Him’. We do not hope to find there springs of wine, honey or milk. We do not expect to enjoy there commerce with women who remain for ever virgin, and to have children by them, for we put no faith in such silly tales engendered by extreme ignorance and by paganism. Far from us be such dreams, such fables. ‘The kingdom of God consisteth not in eating and drinking’, as saith the Holy Spirit, ‘but in justice,’ and ‘at the resurrection men will not marry women, nor women men, but they shall be as the angels.’⁶¹⁵

Such words would be understandable if they came from a Christian observer who had suffered from the Arab onslaught (which Leo perhaps had) but they are somewhat unfitting to

⁶¹² Numani, *Umar* 128.

⁶¹³ Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period* 1-3.

⁶¹⁴ Op. cit. 297.

⁶¹⁵ Op. cit. 328-9. Islamic tradition is actually quite conform with the Christian one on this topic; cf. Lange, *Justice, Punishment and the Medieval Muslim Imagination* 163.

come from the ruler of an empire that had, even as the conquests were going on, persecuted Christians for the purpose of political unity. But if the literary Leo (and one must remember that only as such can he be considered the “author” of the letter quoted by Ghewond and others) was seen as a “new” kind of emperor, a Christian redeemer who had fled from the Arab tyranny in the east and come to restore the true spirit of Christianity within the degenerated Roman empire, this would be precisely the criticism which would have struck the literary ‘Umar, who had himself failed to become a Muslim redeemer in 718, and now stood as the morally dubious ruler over a worldly empire of Arab warriors.

Ghewond claims that the letter had “a very happy effect” on the caliph: “he commenced to treat the Christians with much kindness. He ameliorated their state, and showed himself very favorable towards them, so that on all hands were heard expressions of thankfulness to him.”⁶¹⁶ Similar to the Islamic claim that Heraclius became a secret Muslim after receiving the letter of Muhammad, the Armenian tradition now suggests that ‘Umar II became a secret Christian after reading the letter of Leo III.⁶¹⁷ The statement is, of course, totally at odds with what other sources say: what ‘Umar did was certainly not to make life easier for Christians,⁶¹⁸ but to abandon the ‘Umayyad imperial notion of *Islām* as an hierarchic imperial system led by an exclusive elite of Arab warriors, for promoting a more egalitarian form of Islam that was open to the civil society of non-Arabs. Christian observers do not always seem to have comprehended the full meaning of this important step that would make Islam end its political competition with universal Roman imperialism in order to compete spiritually with the universal Christian faith.⁶¹⁹

It is tempting to make a final analogy with the Leo cause here. If the enormous conquests had convinced the Arabs of their Divine mission to the Abrahamic world, the failures of 717-18 would have plunged them into doubts. Islam was from this time recognised as a separate faith in Constantinople, but this made it only the more manifest that Damascus had not won control over Christianity. Maybe God still favoured the Christians; that would at least explain why ‘Umar showed such an interest in the religious mind of Leo and decided to ask the emperor about the secret that had opened the gates of Constantinople for a Christian *strategos* but not for the armies of Islam.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 330.

⁶¹⁷ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* 46.

⁶¹⁸ Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine* loc.cit.

⁶¹⁹ Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 625, 654; Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* 89f.

1.3.5. Summary

As long as the ‘Umayyad expansionist politics had been pursued without any proselytising agenda, it could have remained a political concern for the conquered peoples: a godless rule which bereaft them of taxes and privileges they had enjoyed, or a worldly opportunity to make a new career and gain other benefits. In any case it is clear that the ‘Umayyads did not rise from their religiosity (even if they and their proponents wished it were so). Moral and politics seldom go together, and the ‘Umayyad rule became the target of criticism not only from pious Christians, but from Muslims who perceived any worldly rule as godless. The same mechanisms that had helped them win the confidence from the Roman population, caused their downfall through the mechanisms which had weakened Roman rule in the region. It was a bad time for empires of this world.⁶²⁰

On the Muslim side, the central authority in Damascus certainly did – with interruptions caused by internal discord – externalise the warfaring potential of the Arabs in a way that created a vast pocket of peace for the settled groups living within their realms. With the right to proclaim *ḡihad* and to lead the winter and summer expeditions against the non-Muslim neighbours, the caliph took the position of a centralised authority which gave the war a *purpose*, that of a common *Islām* rather than the *motive* of the individual Muslim. But if confidence in the moral superiority of the ruler was lost, the purpose would not be clear anymore; if the force which had toppled so many rulers suddenly had become a ruling force itself, it had lost its moral initiative to continue a struggle for higher goals. The holy war had lost its holiness and become just another war in a world where wars abounded. If Islam had been propelled forward by eschatological expectations in the end of all immoral rule, this was likely to cause an identity crisis. An apocalyptic “fall of the Roman empire” might have brought an end to the world as people knew it whether they were Muslim Arabs or not, but by acting as its executioner, the latter gave their opponents the moral right to claim that Arab

⁶²⁰ Is it connected to a rise of confidence in microeconomies or to a loss of confidence in macroeconomies? Horden and Purcell have made several observations on the “Early Medieval Depression” and the Pirenne thesis in *The Corrupting Sea* (cf. 153-60 as well as VII:6 and VIII in general) but here it might suffice to quote Peter Brown: “The basic weakness of all ancient empires – and this weakness was put to the acid test for Iran, for Byzantium and for Spain by the Arab invasions of the seventh century A. D. – may not be the resistance of a part of the population to the assimilative effort of their rulers so much as the quasi-total non-participation of the vast majority of the producers of wealth.” (“Town, Village and Holy Man 164”.)

power was as godless, depraved and worldly as the one they had overthrown. A people seen as a “purge” of the earthly rule of Rome, had merely created a new “Roman” state while doing so. It is important to note that such an accusation would have been independent of the religious borders, since it left lasting marks also upon how the Muslims came to recall the rule of the “cursed tree” of Banu ‘Umayya⁶²¹ – the ruling dynasty which had let themselves become absorbed by the earthly vanities of the declining Roman empire, instead of fulfilling the fight for a complete end of the world and the coming of the Rule of God.⁶²² In this sense, the failure in 717-18 to open the gates of Constantinople was not so much a failure to establish a Muslim empire that replaced the Roman, as the failure to make an end to history and open the gates of Heaven.⁶²³

The Islamising efforts initiated during the short rule of ‘Umar II might be seen as an effort to win back the moral initiative by lessening the elitist approach of the Muslim invaders. For the ‘Umayyad *Realpolitik*, however, it was suicide: it bereaft the state of people to tax, and it undermined the centralised authority of the caliph – in fact the reign of ‘Umar II has been called the beginning of the ‘Abbasid revolution.⁶²⁴ Paradoxically, from a Roman perspective it might also seem that the Late Antiquity Mediterranean culture survived longer in its Arabo-Islamic form: after the death of ‘Umar II in 720, the “imperial party” returned to power in Damascus as the line of inheritance continued along the sons of ‘Abd al-Malik, the builders of the desert estates with their famous frescoes and mosaics.⁶²⁵ The long reign of Hisham (726-743), though, was a continuous series of military setbacks, and at the end, the ‘Umayyad dynasty had not even their worldly prestige to rely upon. Meanwhile, the spiritual power of an Islam that was no more a specifically Arab faith had started to live its own life in the Near east – just like an independent Roman Christianity in the seventh century had proved able to survive its crumbling imperial framework.

⁶²¹ As Crone and Hinds underlined (*God’s Caliph* 23) it is the popular resistance rather than Abbasid bias which seems to have coloured the sources.

⁶²² Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 312ff. This does not require any ideology: classical authors imagined an Alexander becoming corrupted by the Near Eastern peoples he subdued and dying as an Oriental tyrant.

⁶²³ And assuming that no Armageddon would have occurred even if the ‘Umayyads *had* captured Constantinople, the predicament would have been the same, even if the geopolitical situation would have been totally different.

⁶²⁴ Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* 168.

⁶²⁵ On the last ‘Umayyad caliph, Marwan II, Theophanes says that he “belonged to the sect of the Epicureans.” (AM 6241) It is unclear which Syriac word he substituted with this name for an ancient Greek school of philosophy; at least it does not seem to imply that the caliph was a pious Muslim.

2. Borderlands

Introduction

Together, the Taurus and the Elbroz mountains delimit the Fertile Crescent from Anatolia in the north and from Iran in the east. In the south, the Syrian desert marks the most far part of desert Arab power.⁶²⁶ Anatolia, surrounded by mountains on all sides, has many feats in common with the Iranian plateau, and culturally, they conflate in the regions of Armenia.⁶²⁷ But it lay yet not prone to Turkish nomad invasions, and on the surface of its ethnical and religious heterogeneity it had been dominated by the Hellenic west for a millennium, both economically, culturally and politically.⁶²⁸ Iran, on the other hand, had always struggled to integrate foreign invaders with the domestic Persian *hochkultur*.⁶²⁹

During the millennium which passed from Alexander the Great to the Prophet Muhammad, the “Barbarian Plains”⁶³⁰ to the south had been torn between the cultural influences of these two geographical entities: the highlands and the sea, Iran and the Mediterranean.⁶³¹ It was an arena for Romanised and Persianised Arab tribes to display the fragile stability that followed the acknowledgement of the foreign civilisations, and the evasive wealth that followed with the power over the interior economies.⁶³² Cities like Petra and Palmyra still show the ruins of a splendour that disappeared as soon as either the overlords or the trade routers changed their mind. A more stable relationship with the desert had the Christian monasteries developed: they posed no political threat, and the Arab tribes often respected the monks as holy men with spiritual powers.⁶³³

⁶²⁶ Cf. Ibn Khaldun on the Arabs and the plainlands, *Muqaddimah* 194.

⁶²⁷ Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* 25ff.

⁶²⁸ Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor* 42-68. On local cults and piety, see Foss, “Pilgrimage in Medieval Asia Minor”.

⁶²⁹ Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia* 35ff.

⁶³⁰ Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain* 1-5. The plain (τὸ βαρβαρικὸν πεδῖον) stretches beyond the borders of the desert, making the Fertile crescent easy accessible or vulnerable, depending on one’s perspective.

⁶³¹ Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* 32-6.

⁶³² Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth* 15ff.

⁶³³ Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* 289ff.

After the Arab conquests, the Barbarian plains did not border foreign empires anymore but were parts of the *Dār al-Islām*, the Islamic empire. Restless Arabs and their confederates now crossed the Taurus border and raided Byzantine Anatolia, or spread in the ruins of Sassanid Persia, whose border fortifications they happily reused for the former purpose.⁶³⁴ But again, they represented temporary phenomena; it was the Islamisation of Iran (which perhaps even might be called the Iranisation of Islam) that would have lasting importance in what can be seen as a social reversal of the Islamic integration in Syria.⁶³⁵ As the ‘Umayyad elites in the West faced a growing number of Arabs and Muslim converts who felt disadvantaged by the empire, the “Arab kingdom” was gradually devoured from the undergrowths of its own faith.⁶³⁶

The role of ethnic and religious identity in the ‘Abbasid revolution – most notably the Persian and Zoroastrian factor – should not be discussed here.⁶³⁷ What is important is that the fall of the ‘Umayyads meant that the centralised *Islām* of a powerful elite was challenged by a Muslim revolutionary movement. Under the leadership of the Khurasani Abu Muslim, a “*muslim* who is a son of a *muslim* and the father of a *muslim*” as Shaban put it,⁶³⁸ the revolutionaries raised their black banners throughout countries whose loyalty to Islam had until then been wound up with the loyalty to the caliph, and culminated with the extinction, not only of the ‘Umayyad elites,⁶³⁹ but also their physical remnants in Syria.⁶⁴⁰ Though the latter were replaced by a new dynasty, the Abbasid, and the sources of religious legitimation for the revolution should in no way be exaggerated,⁶⁴¹ the impact of the 749-50

⁶³⁴ Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society* 128-164; Bonner, “The Naming of the Frontier” 18f.

⁶³⁵ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 13: “It united areas and peoples that for a millennium had been subject to Hellenization ever since Alexander the Great while it isolated politically and geographically the Byzantines”.

⁶³⁶ Crone, Hinds, *God’s Caliph* 106; Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period* 41f.

⁶³⁷ Cf. Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia* 126ff to Lassner, *The Shaping of ‘Abbasid Rule* 175ff. Grabar, “Umayyad ‘Palace’ and the ‘Abbasid ‘Revolution’” suggests that the first important factor was not one about class, religion or ethnicity, but the shift in economical strength from Syria to Iraq and the Eastern provinces, a development that took place under ‘Umayyad rule and even was promoted by the caliphs in Damascus.

⁶³⁸ Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* 154; cf. also Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory* IV.

⁶³⁹ Robinson, *Empire and Elites* VI-VII.

⁶⁴⁰ The tombs of Hisham, Sulayman, Walid, Abd al-Malik and Yazid were all looted and, whatever found in them, burned. But of course the story of their dynasty was far from finished: it continued at the other end of the sea which had been the heart of their empire: the last ‘Umayyad fled across the Mediterranean to Spain, where a new caliphate was in full bloom two centuries later.

⁶⁴¹ Zaman, *Religion and Politics und the Early Abbasids* 71ff.

events upon the historical memory is considerable:⁶⁴² it claimed to revive Islam as it had been before the conquests – prophetic, egalitarian, ascetic –⁶⁴³ but (and this is crucial) it was now a phenomenon belonging to the world it claimed to reject.

The Christian empire delivered by Leo III in 718 underwent important changes as well, first and foremost as it was hit by what later Byzantine tradition depicted as the most disturbing religious schism in its entire history: the Iconoclasm, or breaking of Christian images, which was reportedly initiated by Leo III and culminated under his son, Constantine V.⁶⁴⁴ More practical issues were involved here, too, as the mid-eighth-century saw the definite physical disintegration of the old Roman world. Until 753, the Roman popes were installed after formal recognition from the emperor in Constantinople and many of them had Eastern origins.⁶⁴⁵ From the pontificate of Stephen II the pontiffs had Italian or Western origin, and they were no more confirmed in their office by the emperor.⁶⁴⁶ The official reason for renewed tension was the proclamation of Iconoclasm, but it is important to put the issue in a geographical perspective and not simplify the dissolving world of the eighth century as a consequence of religious disagreements.⁶⁴⁷ Heraclius had initiated a schism with Rome a century before, but political power over the Mediterranean had still enabled his grandson to punish the disobedient pope. To Leo III, religious unity by force was no longer an option: the Mediterranean itself purportedly prevented imperial intervention against Rome,⁶⁴⁸ and when the Frankish king proved more able than the emperor to oust the Langobards, middle Italy slipped out of Constantinopolitan control.⁶⁴⁹

If the Byzantine empire – as it might be called from this point – lost ground in the West, it found the basic interior form it would keep for centuries in the East, stretching

⁶⁴² Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory* 135f.

⁶⁴³ Crone, Hinds, *God's Caliph* 106passim, Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 75.

⁶⁴⁴ Belting, *Bild und Kult* 166ff.

⁶⁴⁵ John V (685-6), Sergius (687-701), Sisinnius (708), Constantine (708-15), Gregory III (731-41) were Syrians; John VI (701-5), John VII (705-7) and Zacharias (741-52) were Greeks from Sicily or southern Italy. Cf. Louth, *Greek East and Latin West* 78ff.

⁶⁴⁶ Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums* II:740.

⁶⁴⁷ For a concise summary, see Hallenbeck, "The Roman-Byzantine Reconciliation of 728".

⁶⁴⁸ Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums* II:665.

⁶⁴⁹ However, *possessed by his Arab mentality*, says Theophanes on Leo III, *he imposed a capitation tax on one third of the people of Sicily and Calabria and decreed that watch should be kept to have new-born infants entered in a register ... something that not even his mentors the Arabs have ever done to the Christians in the East* (AM 6224, transl. Mango).

over the two peninsulas of Anatolia and the Balkans, threatened by the Arabs in the south and the Bulgars in the north.⁶⁵⁰ The latter posed an acute military threat to the capital, but lay more prone to its cultural influence, as will be discussed later on. The former made no new attempts to conquer Constantinople, but posed a demoralising threat to the interiors of Anatolia, and for the moment, that should be our point of focus. The defence of these poor and disintegrated interiors and their sudden coming of importance seems to form the very foundation of the new empire.⁶⁵¹ It was from there that Leo III had originated, and his son, Constantine V, took great care to defend them by creating a vast strip of no-mans-land that should discourage the Arabs from penetrating further into Cappadocia.⁶⁵²

From bird's eye, the Taurus border was a battle-ground for two political enemies with different universal aims.⁶⁵³ But as should be clear from these introducing remarks, this part of the work concerns not "borderlands" of a sharply defined dividing-line between the Muslim and Byzantine empires, but "borderlands" *against* their centralising power.⁶⁵⁴ The Anatolian plateau became not only a bastion for Byzantineness but also a complicated counter-weight to the capital; an unruly borderland of ethnic diversion and heresy, where fighters rose to claim the imperial purple just like Leo III had done.⁶⁵⁵ Similarly, along the other side of the border, Muslim fighters crammed together, united not only against the Christian neighbour, but against the centralising efforts of the Muslim caliphate.⁶⁵⁶ If the previous part of this work was focusing upon the political attraction of a religious elite in Damascus and its Roman counterpart, the point of focus here is the challenge of religious *beliefs* in a world of political confusion and destabilisation.

⁶⁵⁰ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival* 3, 13.

⁶⁵¹ Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* 25-30, 194ff.

⁶⁵² Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze des byzantinischen Reiches* 39ff.

⁶⁵³ Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenetos and his World* 107-22.

⁶⁵⁴ Bosworth, "The city of Tarsus and the Arab-Byzantine Frontiers" 276. In november 2008, I met dr. Asa Eger in Istanbul and learned about his recent PhD on this topic, but I had not seen it as this chapter was written.

⁶⁵⁵ Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 165f, 204f.

⁶⁵⁶ Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 132f.

2.1. Saints, Warriors, Saviours

Stop writing of Homer and the stories about Achilles
as those of Hector; they are lying.
Alexander the Macedonian, Great in mind,
co-worked with God and became ruler of the world.
And this man [the Arab *‘amīr*] found God with straight mind
and got strength and courage through Him.⁶⁵⁷

When “Digenis Akritas” was jotted down in the 11th century, the Byzantine-Arab border conflicts lay several centuries back, but continued to tease the fantasy of people just like the Western medieval romances did long after the Crusades ceased. It is an important fact to note, for it pinpoints one of the more problematic aspects of religious borders in the Medieval world. Digenis is hardly a moral ideal for a pious Christian: at twelve, he abducts a girl, joins a robber band and in a famous episode later on in the epic, he rapes an Amazon.⁶⁵⁸ But still his actions appear in a Christian framework of identification from the very start, where his father, the Syrian *‘amīr*, leaves his Muslim faith to live in Roman Anatolia with the Christian bride he had previously abducted. The sociocultural and political differences between the two camps of robber barons seems to be non-existent:⁶⁵⁹ the border which separates the *‘amīr* from the Roman girl is a spiritual one, and as a such, it seems to define the meaning of the whole epic. Yet it is very problematic to define in terms of modern spirituality.

A modern scholar might be tempted to initiate a discussion on theological differences between Christianity and Islam, and focus upon the remarkable impact of thought and faith on the Medieval man, just like the author of the Grottaferrata version takes the opportunity to insert the whole Orthodox credo in the epic.⁶⁶⁰ But that would presuppose a

⁶⁵⁷ Παύσασθε γράφειν Ὅμηρον καὶ μύθους Ἀχιλλέως ὡσαύτως καὶ τοῦ Ἑκτορος, ἅπερ εἰσὶ ψευδέα. Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μακεδῶν δυνατὸς ἐν φρονήσει, Θεόν τε ἔχων συνεργὸν γέγονε κοσμοκράτωρ. Αὐτὸς δὲ φρόνημα στεργὸν ἔχων Θεόν ἐπεγνω, ἐκέκτητο καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἀνδρείαν τε καὶ τόλμην. *Digenis Akritas* G 4:27-32.

⁶⁵⁸ *Digenis Akritas* E 1575, G 5-6 (the clearly embarrassed author of the Grottaferrata version condemns it).

⁶⁵⁹ “Robber baron” here only refers to the mythical world of Digenis. On artistic and archaeological evidence for common aristocratic tastes in the Byzantine-Arab borderlands, see the article of Mathews & Mathews, “Islamic-Style Mansions in Byzantine Cappadocia and the Development of the Inverted T-plan”.

⁶⁶⁰ *Digenis Akritas* G 3:171-190.

sophisticated approach to religion that has very little to do with people battling Amazons. Digenis is not only a hero because he struggles for the Christian faith, but also in a primitive sense as someone enjoying superhuman powers through the grace of God.⁶⁶¹ Here, the “spiritual reality” is as much a “reality of spirits”, a context where invisible forces play an active role in the existence of men.⁶⁶² And though Papadopoulos was right to state that the historical material of the Acritic period is too scarce to make any socioanthropological conclusions on its underlying mentality,⁶⁶³ a few important facts should be discussed here.

2.1.1. Unseen Warfare

... and when [Ammonios] had said this, [the evil spirit] instantly left the man, and as soon as he had been healed, the man came to believe in Christ and all his people with him, and thus they received the Holy Baptism.⁶⁶⁴

The pre-Islamic desert Arabs were familiar with Christianity through monks and anachoretes who lived at the outskirts of the desert all along the Fertile Crescent. This is not only experienced from the Islamic tradition,⁶⁶⁵ but from the pre-Islamic *vitas* of the desert fathers, who were sometimes consulted by Arabs to drive out demons or djinns.⁶⁶⁶ Such stories normally end up with the “Saracens” (like “noble savages”) becoming Christians, but one should remain cautious about the theological implication of this. Long after the coming of Islam, Christian priests in Muslim lands would face the problem of Arabs and Turks asking for their children to be baptised or their wives to receive the Holy Communion, though refusing to confess the Christian faith or to give their children a Christian education.⁶⁶⁷ In fact,

⁶⁶¹ Papadopoulos, “The Acritic Hero” 131-2.

⁶⁶² Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* 33ff.

⁶⁶³ Papadopoulos, “The Acritic Hero” 138.

⁶⁶⁴ καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν ἐξῆλθεν εὐθέως ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὅθεν παραχρῆμα ἰαθεὶς ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐπίστεσεν τῷ Χριστῷ μετὰ καὶ ἄλλων πολλῶν, οὕτω ξιωθέντων τοῦ ἀγίου βαπτίσματος. *Vita Ammonios* 14; thanks to Johannes Grossmann.

⁶⁶⁵ Q 57:27 does not denounce monasticism but suggests that it represents an exaggeration of the faith. Still, it was a monk who foresaw the coming greatness of the ten-year-old Muhammad.

⁶⁶⁶ Cf. above and Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* 289ff.

⁶⁶⁷ Problems discussed in this era by Jacob of Edessa (cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 162ff and esp. n170) and later by the 12th-century author Balsamon (cf. Brand, “The Turkish Element in Byzantium” 16f, this

Bedouins in the Syrian and Egyptian deserts are known to visit Christian monasteries still as of today, asking the monks to expel djinns,⁶⁶⁸ which does not at all mean that these Arabs are Christians; for them, the exorcism is not a spiritual matter, but a practical: a person possessed by a djinn is first and foremost detected by his inability to *function* normally,⁶⁶⁹ and the monk seems, rather than a guide in intellectual matters of faith, as a person to deal with spirits who have wrongfully entered the physical reality.

In Byzantium, as almost everywhere in premodern society, demons were an acknowledged part of life.⁶⁷⁰ They could appear in a wide range of forms: as ghosts, animals, humans; they could hide their ugly nature beyond a beautiful face in order to win the confidence of their victims, or a monstrous one in order to frighten them.⁶⁷¹ They were particularly keen to harass monks and hermits.⁶⁷² In the *vitas*, they sometimes appear in the form of Arabs, before as well as after Islam.⁶⁷³ Though this does not mean that Arabs were generally seen as demons, it is important to note that the border between the physical and spiritual reality becomes blurred if one believes that spirits have the capability of assuming a physical form.⁶⁷⁴ The alleged letter of Leo III to ‘Umar II insinuates that Islam is a Pagan faith

quotation being of particular interest here) as well as by Photius in the ninth century (cf. ch. 3.2.3). See also Koukoules, *Byzantinon bion kai politismos*, 54f. Yet even such stories might achieve a Christian sensum morale, demonstrating how little the “noble savage” imagination of the “Saracen” had changed after the rise of Islam: cf. Daniel Sahas in “What an Infidel Saw that a Faithful Did Not”, on a legend of St. George in which a “Pagan” (Muslim) Arab, on entering a church, is able to “see” the eucharist as it truly “is”.

⁶⁶⁸ Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain* 169ff, 188ff, 406f.

⁶⁶⁹ Dols, *Majnun: The Madman in the Medieval Islamic World* 21ff. There is an interesting footnote here (n20) on Turkish studies (1969 and 1977 respectively) comparing attitudes to mental illness in modern Ankara with those of remote Anatolian villages.

⁶⁷⁰ Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* 134-8.

⁶⁷¹ Müller, “von Teufel, Mittagsdämon und Amuletten”, Chrysostomos, “Demonology in the Orthodox Church”.

⁶⁷² Chryssavgis, “The Monk and the demon”, Grün, *Der Umgang mit dem Bösen*.

⁶⁷³ For instance, in the sixth century John Moschos tells us about a demon trying to seduce a monk in the form of an Arab boy (*Pratum Spirit.* LX/3028; but there is a clearly non-demonological report in CXXXVI/3000 on a Christian Arab woman). In tenth century Constantinople, St. Andrew the fool saw a demon (amongst other things) in the guise of an Arab: Ἴδου τὸ διεφθαρμένον δαιμόνιον, ὅταν θέλῃ ποίει αὐτὸν γραῦν, καὶ ὅταν θέλῃ ποίει αὐτὸν Ἀγαρηνὸν, σχῆμα ἔχων ἐνδεδυμένος μέλαν ἱμάτιον ... *Vita S. Andreae Salis* 681.

⁶⁷⁴ The topic of an extremely interesting thesis by McCrillis, *The Demonization of Minority Groups in Christian Society during the Central Middle Ages*; cf. esp. Urban II:s perception of Muslims who attack Christians due to being possessed by demons, 192ff and ch. IV in general. Sometimes it is put in connection to the darker skin of Muslim peoples. Cf. also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 87-103.

whose god is a demon that had been expelled to the desert.⁶⁷⁵ Athanasius of Sinai, who never seems to admit the existence of Islam as a separate religion, claims that the Arabs are companions of demons, but worse, since according to him most demons fear and respect Christian symbols and sacraments.⁶⁷⁶ A Spanish chronicler basing his report about the emergence of Islam on eastern sources suggests that the Islamic creed is a convocation of demons.⁶⁷⁷ John of Damascus, living in a Muslim milieu, does not go that far, but he still seems to believe that Muslim exclamation *ʾAllāhu ʾakbar* (“God is the greatest”) is a hidden praise of a Pagan goddess with some connection to the Black Stone in the Ka’ba.⁶⁷⁸

On the Arab side of the fence, a “reality of spirits” is acknowledged after as well as before Islam. The Qur’an affirms that djinns – the name coming from the root *ǧanna*, to be hidden or invisible – exist just as humans and angels do; they are created from fire,⁶⁷⁹ they possess free will, and hence they are also receptive to matters of faith.⁶⁸⁰ Prophets like Salomo tamed them and God forced them to work for him,⁶⁸¹ whereas Muhammad was sent to preach, not only to humans, but also to djinns.⁶⁸² On the same time, the Qur’an explicitly warns humanity for the power of the djinns,⁶⁸³ and it is stated that Iblis (the devil) is one of them.⁶⁸⁴ In some Muslim tradition, the capability of Jesus to deal with djinns is said to have dealt a hard blow to their power over humanity;⁶⁸⁵ it is easy to imagine how similar feats were ascribed to Christian monks in the Fertile crescent. Jews, in Christian and Muslim contexts alike, are often brought in connection with magic practices involving djinns.⁶⁸⁶ What is important to note about this is that as long as there does not exist a strong dualistic conviction

⁶⁷⁵ Lewond, transl. Jeffery, 322f.

⁶⁷⁶ Anastasius Sinaitae, *Quaestiones* CXXVI. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 99f.

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. Wolf, “The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad” 99f.

⁶⁷⁸ John of Damascus, *De haeresibus* 764-5, 769. Now, this was of course not the same as saying that Islam is the result of being possessed by demons, and like many other Christian authors, John (in a rather prosaic way) suggests that Muhammad was an epileptic and that it was the source of his revelations. But then, epilepsy was also recognised in Christian tradition as an affliction which Jesus healed by driving out demons (*Mark* 9:17).

⁶⁷⁹ Q 15:27, 55:15.

⁶⁸⁰ Q 51:56, 55:33.

⁶⁸¹ Q 27:17ff, 34:12ff.

⁶⁸² Q 46:29ff, 72.

⁶⁸³ Q 6:112, 6:128ff, 7:38, 7:179, 114.

⁶⁸⁴ Q 18:50.

⁶⁸⁵ al-Ghazzali, *ʾIhyā ʿUlūm ad-Dīn* III:32.

⁶⁸⁶ McCrillis, *The Demonization of Minority Groups* 22passim. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalypics* 315.

on an eschatological struggle between Good and Evil, both djinns and demons can be accepted as a natural part of human existence: the necessity to protect oneself against their power does not necessarily imply a will to extinguish them (since this might be considered impossible).⁶⁸⁷ When djinns and demons are an active part of the physical reality, their rejection can be a matter detached from the metaphysical question of the ultimate and universal religious Truth, which belongs to God alone.

In order to deal with djinns, Islam has its own methods, though it should be admitted that the spiritual aspect of *ḡihād* is not particularly present in the sources before the Sufi tradition had fully developed.⁶⁸⁸ There, just like in Christian monasticism, the “unseen warfare” plays a central role,⁶⁸⁹ and this is also where Christianity meets a truly spiritual challenge from Islam. If there was a tendency among Christians to consider the Muslim faith as a mere continuation of Pagan Arab practices and the Muslim God as an evil spirit, the reverse is also true from the point when the Arab considers himself a Pagan no more. From that point, the Christian exorcist runs the risk of being put in the same box where he himself once put the Pagan magicians and sorcerers.⁶⁹⁰ The conceptual exclusiveness of both parts can easily turn into a purely dogmatic matter, for Sufi practices are sometimes confusingly similar to those of Orthodox mystics.⁶⁹¹ It means that the “holiness” of the spiritual war – the way it will be judged by God – will ultimately lie in the eyes of the person or the persons accepting or rejecting the universal truth of the spiritual warrior.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. the traditions about the Dajjal, or Antichrist of Islam, sometimes identified with a peculiar Jew in Medina in the time of Muhammad. Asked whether the man ought to be killed, the Prophet answered that it would be fruitless, for if he were the Dajjal, he could not be killed. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalypitics* 110ff.

⁶⁸⁸ The main weapons consist in reciting the last three Suras of the Qur’an, *Sūrat al-Ihlās* (*Say: God is one...*) *Sūrat al-Falaq* (*I seek protection in the Lord of the Dawn, from the evil He has created ...*) and *Sūrat an-Nās* (*I seek protection in the Lord of men ... from the evil of the treacherous whisperer, who whispers in the hearts of men, from the djinn and the men*), all affirming the ultimate unity of God as master of the whole creation.

⁶⁸⁹ Nasr, “The Prayer of the Heart in Hesychasm and Sufism” 200f.

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. the sensmorale in the *Acts* 19:13-17, where an exorcism that is not “truly” performed in the name of Jesus Christ (in this case by a group of Jews) only makes the evil spirit more violent. *Q* 37:158 suggests that Christians and Pagan Arabs believe in an affinity between God and Djinn.

⁶⁹¹ I have personally met an Orthodox priest who talked about the “dangers” of Hesychast practices due to their confusing resemblance to those of the Sufis.

⁶⁹² One of the most famous examples of a moral story on this topic comes from the great *Mantiq at-Tayir* (*Conference of the Birds*) by the 12th century Sufi poet Farid ud-Din Attar: a Muslim sheikh is so possessed by a dream in which he had seen himself worshipping a Christian idol, that he travels to Byzantium and falls in love

2.1.2. The Soul and the Flesh

A Roman, who had converted to Islam and become an excellent Muslim, told me that in some of their churches, the Romans have pictures of ten people they know for their strength and courage, and among them are Muslims renowned for their cunningness.⁶⁹³

The quotation here comes from Mas'udi in the early tenth century and is likely to seem a tad absurd from a Byzantine – or Islamic – viewpoint. It is not without precursor, though, for here has already been quoted the reports on the tomb of Abu Ayyoub in Constantinople, where, says Tabari, “Romans prayed in times of drought.”⁶⁹⁴ Unlike Tabari, Mas'udi was accustomed with the Byzantine and Roman culture, not only from books, but from having visited the borderlands himself.⁶⁹⁵ Instead of outright rejecting the report, the question one should ask before this passage is how it might be reconciled with a Byzantine reality.

The description “people known for their strength and courage” (as well as the *do ut des* does practice hinted in the report of Tabari) of course fits a vast number of Late Antiquity and Medieval saints; Christian sainthood is not exclusively spiritual matter. Just as the soul of the saint is able to intermeditate between God and the physical world after death, his body is a powerful intermediary in a world where the holy man can protect people from evil but also afflict them with curses.⁶⁹⁶ In the rural areas of Anatolia and Syria, the physical devotion to the saint could sometimes obtain extreme forms, where the distinction between the dead and the living became blurred.⁶⁹⁷ It is not so easy to dismiss the stories about the Stylite cult and the morbid hunt for their relics as expressions of Christian fanaticism or Medieval fancies when the authorship itself discloses a certain level of literary

with a girl there. Ultimately, however, his own spiritual truth proves to be stronger, and he overcomes the false infatuation which Christianity, the girl, and the image represents, directing his love towards God alone.

⁶⁹³ wa-aḥḥbaranī baʿdu r-Rūmi miman kāna qad ʿaslama wa-ḥasana ʿislāmuhū ʿinna r-Rūma ṣawwarat ʿašara anfasu fī baʿdi kanāʿisihā min ʿahli l-baʿs wa n-naḡdati wa-l-makāyidi fī n-naṣrānīyati wa-l-ḥaylati min l-muslimimīna. Mas'udi, *Murūğ ad-daḥab* VIII:74.

⁶⁹⁴ Tabari, *Tārīḥ* III:2324.

⁶⁹⁵ Shboul, *Al-Mas'udi and his World* 227ff, 235ff.

⁶⁹⁶ Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean* 162ff; Brown, “Town, Village and Holy Man” 162f.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., Foss, “Pilgrimage in Asia Minor” 140ff, and Geanakoplos, *Byzantium* 177f. Cf. Zabełlicky, “Frühesten anthropologische Interessen in Ephesos?” on Muslim “pilgrimage” to the Cave of the Sleepers in Ephesus.

sophistication.⁶⁹⁸ Rather, one should take the literary accounts for what they are: Christian interpretations of a reality that could have been “Pagan” or “Muslim” as well, since it is atavistically human.⁶⁹⁹ If there was a church – or any churches – in Anatolia where ten figures of Muslim and Paulician warriors were displayed (among them such a feared warrior as al-Battal)⁷⁰⁰ one might infer that it exemplifies a context where theological differences had become secondary to the practical.⁷⁰¹ The report of Mas’udi could be put on the same level as the 15-century reports of Busbecq on Sufis praying before images of St. George in Istanbul, a practice documented among Muslim women in Syria still as of today.⁷⁰²

The last point becomes especially interesting when we turn to the Byzantine warrior saints, some of which gained fame in precisely the era and area we are studying. Their popularity seems to have been related to their physically protecting role: they had given up their lives as soldiers under the Pagan emperors, become martyrs and entered the “heavenly army” from which they now could infer on behalf of the pious in times of distress.⁷⁰³ The most famous “trinity” of warrior saints – St. George, St. Demetrios and St. Theodore – evoked at the beginning of *Digenis Akritas*, as young Constantine sets out to fight the Arab emir,⁷⁰⁴ belongs to a vast group of Christian saints, whose miracles have taken so many forms during the course of the Middle ages – slaying dragons and demons, rescuing captive maidens and boys, destroying Pagan idols and proving the strength of Christian symbols and sacraments – that they have turned into some of the most well-known archetypes of Western “mythology”

⁶⁹⁸ Krueger, “Writing as Devotion” 710f, 718f.

⁶⁹⁹ Cf. with modern studies such as Katia Sündermann, *Spirituelle Heiler im modernen Syrien* (Münster 2006), Barbara Drieskens, *Living with Djinn*s (London 2008) or Thomas Hauschild, *Ritual und Gewalt: Ethnologische Studien an europäischen und mediterranen Gesellschaften* (Frankfurt 2008, reviewed by A. Holl in *Die Presse* 10. 11. 2008). – There is absolutely no reason to engage in discussion with either the disdainful attacks of an Edward Gibbon or the devotional interpretations of a Hugo Ball to the reality mirrored in the Byzantine hagiographic texts, because whether we despise or admire it, we have to do with an irrational aspect of the human nature which *the texts* do not change – they are merely trying to give them a meaning from *their own* point of understanding.

⁷⁰⁰ Cf. Canard, “Un personnage de Roman arabo-byzantin”; Pannewick, “Kreuz, Eros und Gewalt” 211f.

⁷⁰¹ As in the previous case with Muslim Arabs asking Christian monks for help against demons, we have to do with an Aristotelean attitude to truth that is manifested in its *techne* rather than in *phronesis*. (*Sophia*, to take this discussion further, remains a central concept in Sufism and Orthodox mysticism alike.)

⁷⁰² Brotton, “St George between East and West” 61ff.

⁷⁰³ Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* 277-84.

⁷⁰⁴ *Digenis Akritas* G I:20-29.

(especially in the guise of St. George).⁷⁰⁵ However, the cult of the warrior-saint – itself loaded with Jewish and Pagan implications –⁷⁰⁶ already made up such a central element in Late Antiquity devotion that the pre-Islamic Arabs sometimes seems to have confused it with Christianity as such; and just like in Ottoman Turkey, it lived forth in popular religion in Arab Muslim Syria, the saint now being identified with the Qur’anic al-Khidr.⁷⁰⁷

Traditional Islam – as opposed to the innumerable attitudes displayed by groups often heaped together under the epithet Shi’i or Sufi – is expected to reject the cult of saints. However, it has given a famous change of meaning to the word martyr (*šahīd*, “witness”, a direct translation of the Greek word) by transferring it to warriors who have died fighting for the cause of Islam.⁷⁰⁸ In the Qur’an, relating to the close-knitted community of Muhammad, the meaning of the latter concept is clear-cut,⁷⁰⁹ but in the borderlands it becomes as complex as its context. In ‘Umayyad Syria and Iraq, where tribalism and imperialism struggled to control the individual, a Roman system of hire and wages had been Arabised for the employment of border warriors, but it had also been rejected by the Islamic traditionalists who regarded the ‘Umayyads as godless and tried to define a purely religious normative system of a holy warrior.⁷¹⁰ A *muğāhid* who merely fights for a personal longing after money or seeks martyrdom for personal prestige is allotted to a terrible place in hell:⁷¹¹ for God will lift the veil from all that had been hidden⁷¹² and judge every man after his inner intentions (*niyya*).⁷¹³ It is clearly an apocalyptic morale, for it denies the physical meaning of the world.⁷¹⁴ But it is

⁷⁰⁵ Aufhauser, *Das Drachenwunder des Heiligen Georg* 2-11 for a concise summary.

⁷⁰⁶ Walter, *The Byzantine Warrior Saint* 9-38.

⁷⁰⁷ Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain* 179f, 189ff. Today, they seems to have a reputation for helping Muslim women to childbirth; the Medieval Byzantine warrior-saints also had a protective role for the new-born.

⁷⁰⁸ Goldzieher, *Muhammedanische Studien* II:387ff; cf. Brunotte, “Martyrium, Vaterland und der Kult der toten Krieger” 97.

⁷⁰⁹ Q 3:169.

⁷¹⁰ Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 24-42, 113ff, 130ff.

⁷¹¹ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ* 18:43 (pII:102)

⁷¹² al-Ghazzali, *ʿIḥyā ʿUlūm ad-Dīn* IV:517.

⁷¹³ Nawawi, *ḥadīṭ* 1. Cf. Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 122ff.

⁷¹⁴ Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalypics* 314f. Cf. Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean* 32ff and the whole ch. I from this highly readable work on the disambiguity of Late Antique distinctions of life and death, esp. the conflation of “heroes” with “the dead” in Roman Anatolia and Syria (18). The “sacralisation of death” (ch. IV) seems to be a process that evolves under the surface of theological dogmas, from the ancient world to that of Islam (never mentioned by Samellas). It would still be wrong to call it Gnostic: al-Ghazzali often

also strikingly individualistic: God has seen (*šahada*) the *šahīd* and the *šahīd* has seen God, and they are alone with each other in this mystic unification, where the world is excluded.⁷¹⁵ Yet there *does* exist a world where the *šahīd* is both killed and remembered for it, and that is the world whose darkness the modern historian tries to penetrate.⁷¹⁶

It has been suggested that the *īuġūr*, the Muslim borderland against Byzantium where fighters assembled to raid Anatolia, emerged after the 718 failure to conquer Constantinople, as if the Muslim warriors, unable to vanquish the non-Muslim world, had to vanquish themselves one by one in an act of neurotic iteration.⁷¹⁷ Michael Bonner was sceptic towards such anachronistic explanations, but it is tempting to ask whether the sanctification of these warriors is actually a social projection similar to that which has been discussed with regards to Christian apocalypticism. In order to examine this, we must approach the problem from an essentialist viewpoint and leave the existentialism of the conscious religious being aside: in short, assume that the warrior precedes his holiness,⁷¹⁸ just as Peter Brown suggested that the Late Antiquity “Holy Man” was essentially a social phenomenon.⁷¹⁹

Theories on this topic hardly lack, as warfare and unrest have never lacked in the Near east. Captive sons of Sassanian aristocrats entered the service of their Arab Muslim

expresses the thought that abstractions in our world will *concretise* in the next. Cf. Lange, *Justice, Punishment and the Medieval Muslim Imagination* 143f, 164f.

⁷¹⁵ The notion about one day being able to see God “like the moon in a full moon’s night” became a core element of Islamic traditionalism and gained particular popularity among the border warriors; cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 412. Note that God is also called the *Šahīd*, the Witness, and that the Muslim creed is called the *šahhada*, witnessing. The relationship between the seeing Eye and the Light of God is such a common topic of Islamic mysticism that it hardly needs to be stressed here; cf. Rumi, *Mathnavi* II:1286 for a beautiful example.

⁷¹⁶ Neuwirth, “Blut und Tinte” 37-43, Brunotte, “Martyrium, Vaterland und der Kult der toten Krieger” 97-106; and Frank, “Märtyrer der christlichen Mission” 230 (all from the same anthology).

⁷¹⁷ Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 136; cf. 2.3.1.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid. 132: “jihad began as warfare against the enemies of God, and ... it took some time for consensus to emerge as to precisely those enemies were.” Cf. Bryer, “The Historian’s Digenis Akritas” 102: “... it is not clear what Digenes is fighting for ... [he] acknowledges a distant empire and church which, by convention, heroes and *akritai* do not take much notice of.”

⁷¹⁹ “ A study of the holy man’s actual activities might lead us to question whether this revolution can any longer be fruitfully described, as it is so often described, as the rise of more primitive religious sentiments in a depleted and insecure society. One might suggest, tentatively, that the crisis of Late Antiquity was, rather, a crisis of freedom ... for the farmers of Syria, [t]he [holy man] brought leadership; for the townsmen, the objectivity of a stranger; for innumerable individuals, an oasis of certainty in the conflicting aims and traditions of the world.” Brown, “The Holy Man in Late Antiquity” 148.

masters as *ḡulām* – a word used in *Digenis Akritas* to denote a young warrior or squire –⁷²⁰ and scholars like Mohsen Zakeri have pointed to their Persian influence upon the Islamic warrior groups such as the *‘ayyārūn* or *futuwwa*.⁷²¹ Other scholars, like Speros Vryonis, have connected the rise of the same groups to the old Roman circus-factions, which had still been politically active in Syria and Egypt at the time of the Arab conquest.⁷²² Benjamin Jokisch even went so far as to claim that the name of an early Islamic extremist *ḥawāriḡ*, Nafiq bin Azraq (last name meaning “Blue”) must have been in some way or another connected to his being an earlier supporter of the Byzantine *demos* known as the blue.⁷²³ Sceptics like Alan Cameron have rejected speculations of this kind, which seems completely sensible to do insofar that no conceptual affinity between a religious group and a circus faction can (or is likely to) be proven.⁷²⁴ The social unrest triggered by sports or religions defies conceptual borders⁷²⁵ since it represents deeper forces which are merely resurfacing in times of political destabilisation.⁷²⁶ Cameron, focusing on Constantinople, does not address the issue but it could be useful to consider when we turn to the borderlands,⁷²⁷ as social unrest abounded on

⁷²⁰ The γουλαμίτοι are mentioned throughout the epic. In Arabic, the word means simply “boy” and was mostly used to denote the young Turkish slave-soldiers of the Abbasid caliphate.

⁷²¹ Zakeri, *Sasanian Soldiers in Early Muslim Society* 182f.

⁷²² Vryonis, “Byzantine Circus Factions and Islamic Futuwwa Organisations”.

⁷²³ Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law* 338-347, 453f, 457f.

⁷²⁴ Cameron, *Circus Factions* 341-3. Cameron was eager to point out the fact that the often-related affinity between late Roman circus factions and religious sympathisers is pure imagination (126*passim*).

⁷²⁵ Cf. Sharf, *Jews and Other Minorities in Byzantium* 99f. – Cameron (*op. cit.* 203) quotes a rather amusing observation by the younger Plinius, on the function of the faction colours to the crowd: not to identify the jockeys or their horses, but for the crowd itself *to identify with*. I think it is similarly important here to note that any simultaneous use of the colour green among Muslims and (as has been speculated) Byzantine Monophysites has nothing to do with an affinity of thinking. It is simply a basic principle of heraldry that single colours are easily intelligible and can have a uniting influence upon the crowd. An obvious example is the use of black in the ‘Abbasid revolution, but many modern-day examples could be mentioned as well.

⁷²⁶ Cf. Mo’men, *Shi’i Islam* 199f on the Persian *Lutis* or “street roughs”, a word recalling the same kind of bad manners for which the Byzantine circus factions and the Arab *Futuwwa* bands were equally infamous.

⁷²⁷ Cameron’s explanation to the decline of circus riots in the era surveyed here was most unconvincing: “Naturally they began to riot less. What had they ever gained from riots?” (p310). But of course hooligans do not try to “gain” something from a riot; it is just another aspect of sport when it goes beyond the limits set by the arena. Fotiou deepened the perspectives on this point in “Byzantine Circus Factions and their Riots”. If the increasingly ceremonial role of the circus factions in Byzantium proves the decline of the ancient urban mob, or if the rioters simply went elsewhere cannot be answered here. Perhaps a comparative study in the roles of

both sides of the religious border.⁷²⁸ Michael Bonner, disavowing the ideological connection between the later Crusaders and the Muslim *muğāhids*, maintained their common origins in a world of unruly youths who looked for an alternative to the civil society where they lacked either purpose or identity.⁷²⁹

Now, young men have never hesitated to fight and kill each other for any reason whatsoever; what remains intriguing is what puts the young fighter in a *religious* context.⁷³⁰ To quote Peter Brown again, a “‘reputation of strength’ assumes a community of values”.⁷³¹ One of his own explanations to the changes in the social psychology of the Late Antiquity Near East was that the *paterfamilias* lost his authority to be replaced by the “spiritual father”,⁷³² a figure which early Islamic tradition seems to have integrated with its own perception of the prophets.⁷³³ Christianity and Islam alike owe a great deal of their spiritual universalism to their emphasis upon spiritual kinship, a shocking idea to the traditional Graeco-Roman, Jewish, Arab or Persian mind.⁷³⁴ The idealised Muslim border warriors were preferably young and unmarried people who had turned their backs upon the world, possibly

passively factional (eg. the chariot races) and actively competing sports (polo and tournaments, both known to have been practiced in Byzantium after the eighth century) would give some clues to the changing social role of the Early Medieval individual.

⁷²⁸ As seen from the foregoing remark, an ordered game of sport requires a limited arena to play in: hence the role of the emperor as a patron of the games. But it does not protect the latter from the possibility that the factionary strife spreads outside the arena or that the hooligans unite against him as they did in the Nika riot. A religions factionary struggle, finally, might appear to be totally borderless, but as is the purpose of this entire work to show, it does not play in a spiritual hyperspace but has its own physical boundaries.

⁷²⁹ Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 1-7.

⁷³⁰ On the Byzantine Christianisation of the Judaeo-Christian “holy rider” Solomon, the tamer of demons, killing the devil in the form of a dragon, a snake or a demon from horseback – a depiction which seems to gain in popularity during the era we are discussing here – see Walter, *The Byzantine Warrior Saint*, 36f, 126f, 270f.

⁷³¹ Brown, “Town, Village and Holy Man” 162.

⁷³² “The society of the Empire was overtly patriarchal ... Yet in reality the father remained a distant and awesome figure compared with the true educators ... For so many well-educated young men, the good father was their teacher, not their father. The religious revolution of Late Antiquity contains a surprising number of decisive incidents, each involving the encounter of a lonely and ambitious young man with a man old enough to be his father ...” Brown, “The Holy Man in Late Antiquity” 149.

⁷³³ Cf. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* 69: “...stories about figures like Moses and Jesus began to circulate very early in pious Muslim circles and many of these stories were inspired neither by the Bible nor by the Qur’an but by the historical evolution of the community and in answer to its own needs.”

⁷³⁴ Cf. Beaucamp, “La rébellion contre la famille à Byzance”.

under influence from an inspiring preacher – but as Bonner pointed out, theology seems to have been a minor concern along the *fuḡūr*.⁷³⁵ What mattered was their superhuman powers: “warriors by day and monks by night” they were physically strong enough to form their own reality within which they could pursue their spiritual quest.⁷³⁶ Even the inclusion of Amazon-like female elements in these legends⁷³⁷ only seems to confirm the idealised picture of a chaste, manly milieu, not unlike that of the Byzantine warrior saints.⁷³⁸

Does the emergence of the Acritic borderland and the Muslim *fuḡūr* mirror a world where the patriarchal God had – so to say – gone into occultation and left the field of play to the young Hero?⁷³⁹ One could ring the changes of this theme into perpetuity; what matters is that none of those legendary “black knights” became more invincible in history than the wider society that could integrate the memory of his actions within a coherent historical undertext. There, at the very least, the picture of the Muslim and Paulician warrior disappears from the Byzantine church. As Papadopoulos noted on Digenis Akritas: when “the heroic act is no longer concerned with the forces of nature ... it loses its cosmological character and acquires a specifically social significance. The hero is essentially a social and cultural hero, since his preoccupation is mainly with the organization and promotion of the social group, of which he may be either the ancestor or a mere member.”⁷⁴⁰ The nature of this development should not be scrutinised here; for the moment, one might merely ponder why the father of Digenis is a Muslim Arab: there was probably something of his physical strength which the Byzantine popular mind tried to integrate by making him Christian.

⁷³⁵ Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 125ff.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, 135ff. Cf. Tabari *Tārīḥ* I: 2395.

⁷³⁷ Pannewick, “Kreuz, Eros und Gewalt” 208ff.

⁷³⁸ Walter, *The Byzantine Warrior Saint* 160f, 285ff. There have been recent attempts to find a homoerotic background in such depictions (cf. Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe*, New York 1994) but as Walter emphasises, the imagination – just like its modern-day interpretation – belongs to the subject, not to the imagined object. It seems more interesting to ask what psychological role the image of the chaste young man – just like his wise old counterpart – plays to the popular mind. Cf. 1.2.2. on changing depictions of Jesus, from the sacrificial lamb – equivalent of the young Isaac – to the bearded, patriarchal God of Abraham. Muslim notions about an antropomorph God envisioned him as a youth (van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 389).

⁷³⁹ One should remember that the Muslim and Christian Martyrs *both* seem to emerge as a consequence of the notion that there can be no more prophets after Jesus or Muhammad, only witnesses to their message. As opposed to the prophets, the martyrs are predominantly young people, sometimes even children: still in modern Iran, the dying infant Ali Akbar remains one of the most iconic depictions of the battle at Karbalah.

⁷⁴⁰ Papadopoulos, “The Acritic Hero” 132.

2.2. The Visible and the Invisible

He demanded that the statue should be buried on the spot, since it could not be destroyed. You should really ponder over this, Philokalos, and pray that you will not be led into temptation; and take care when you look at the old sculptures, especially the Greek ones.⁷⁴¹

Eighth century Byzantium is full of paradoxes. It is important to keep the present tense of the verb here, for it *was* of course not more paradoxical than any other era in history; it is the historiographical attitude towards it which makes it difficult to comprehend either in itself or as part of a larger historical structure.⁷⁴² The looming shadow of the Iconoclast controversy polarised Byzantines for centuries; even today, as Ahrweiler has said, it represents a field of study on which “every Byzantinist has his own view.”⁷⁴³ So it comes that the Isaurian emperors, which make their first appearance as saviours of Constantinople from the Arabs, defenders of Christianity against Islam and saint-like protectors in wars against the infidels,⁷⁴⁴ are retrospectively branded as “Arab-minded Syrians” who caused a total havoc in the cultural continuity of the Christian Byzantine empire by destroying the holy images, forbidding the veneration of relics, closing the monasteries and persecuting the learned elites.⁷⁴⁵

The so-called “Parastaseis” offers a few rare glimpses into the darkest period of Byzantine history – a work that scholars have unsuccessfully tried to categorise under such different etiquettes as a travel guide⁷⁴⁶ and a satire.⁷⁴⁷ What can be said is that, if not written for laughs, it is a rather depressing document: the superstitious descriptions of ancient monuments inhabited by evil demons indicate that the author, being able to read and write and possibly even serving the emperor, has not the sufficient knowledge to put his own historical

⁷⁴¹ ... κελεύεται καταχωῶσαι τὸ αὐτὸ ζῶδιον ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ τόπῳ ὃ καὶ γέγονεν διὰ τὸ μὴ δέχεσθαι κατάλυσιν. Ταῦτα, Φιλόκαλε, μετὰ ἀληθείας ἐρευνῶν εὐχου μὴ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς πειρασμὸν καὶ ταῖς ἀρχαίαις στήλαις καὶ μάλιστα ταῖς Ἑλληνικαῖς πρόσεχε θεωρῶν. *Parastasis* 28 (p90).

⁷⁴² Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650-850)* 137ff, Rosenqvist, *Bysantinsk litteratur* 53ff.

⁷⁴³ Ahrweiler, “The Geography of the Iconoclast Period” 21.

⁷⁴⁴ On Leo III, see 1.3.3, 1.3.4; on his son, see Rochow, *Kaiser Konstantin V.* 123-131.

⁷⁴⁵ Mango, “Historical Introduction”, Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 217.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, “Antique Statuary & the Byzantine Beholder” 60.

⁷⁴⁷ Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650-850)* 308ff.

heritage into any meaningful context.⁷⁴⁸ For the modern reader, of course, the danger consists in repeating the perceived mistake by letting the “Parastasis” *ex silentio* represent an era which itself suffers from a lack of historical undertext. The world it depicts is a limited one, which is the reason to why it is difficult to contextualise on a bigger scale. But that is also what makes it fit to initiate a discussion on conceptual borders from a more Constantinopolitan point of view. In all its apparent surrealism, the “Parastaseis” actually offers some of the simplest and most comprehensible explanations to its own world; for instance, the author claims that in the time of Leo III, “many ancient statues were destroyed because the man was irrational”.⁷⁴⁹ This does not necessarily mean that Leo III was mad; but if an apparently unexplicable reverence for certain phenomena was discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter should deal with aspects of an equally unexplicable fear and a clinging to matters that, in fact, might have very little with theology to do.

2.2.1. Spiritual Matters

I do not worship the matter; I worship the great Creator of the matter, who became matter for my sake and entered matter and who through matter became my saviour, and I will never cease to rever that matter through which my salvation was accomplished.⁷⁵⁰

According to a tradition which found its way to Greek and Arabic sources alike, a Jewish sorcerer visited the ‘Umayyad caliph Yazid II a few years after the 717-18 siege of Constantinople and told him it would bring him success if he destroyed all Christian images in the Caliphate. The caliph died before this could be undertaken, but the Jew instead went to

⁷⁴⁸ Dagon, *Constantinople Imaginaire* 29ff. Rosenqvist, *Bysantinsk litteratur* 72-5. Cf. Moffat, “Schooling in the Iconoclast Centuries” 90ff. There are indeed some comical aspects in the work, as in the bizarre report on a shopkeeper in Constantinople who is killed by a wild elephant, but it is unclear whether the author thought so.

⁷⁴⁹ Ἐπὶ Λέοντος τοῦ Ἰσαύρου πολλὰ θεμάτια παρελύθησαν ἀρχαῖα διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα ἀλόγιστον εἶναι, *Parastaseis* 5c (p62).

⁷⁵⁰ Οὐ προσκυνῶ τῇ ὕλῃ, προσκυνῶ δὲ τὸν τῆς ὕλης δημιουργόν, τὸν ὕλην δι' ἐμὲ γενόμενον καὶ ἐν ὕλῃ κατοικήσει καταδεξάμενον καὶ δι' ὕλης τὴν σωτηρίαν μου ἐργασάμενον, καὶ σέβων οὐ παύσομαι τὴν ὕλην, δι' ἧς ἡ σωτηρία μου εἴργασται. John of Damascus, *De Imaginibus* I:16 (1245 A-B).

Constantinople, where he persuaded the “Arab-minded” emperor Leo III to destroy the Christian images in the Byzantine empire.⁷⁵¹

Efforts to connect Byzantine Iconoclasm with Judaism and Islam have proven tenacious.⁷⁵² Though a fair amount of Christian scepticism towards images can be brought up,⁷⁵³ it does not, it seems, explain the cultural disruption caused by Iconoclasm in a world where images had been part of everyday life. What the legend tells us is that early observers tried to explain the inconsistency in Byzantine attitudes to holy images from foreign infiltration,⁷⁵⁴ resulting in something that almost resembles a modern conspiracy theory in its obsession with ideological causality, even if it could have been inspired by actual events.⁷⁵⁵ But it contains more than one historical irony: for the man, whose defence for the images became the scholarly weapon for their later rehabilitation, lived in the ‘Umayyad caliphate and was *also* branded as “Arab-minded” by the Iconoclasts.⁷⁵⁶ “Arab” in this context has ceased to be a word denoting anything we could call meaningful at all; it is simply an invective thrown at an opponent who is accused of companionship with demons and evil forces.

On John of Damascus, also known as al-Mansur, the traditional accounts say that he was a government official and personal friend of one ‘Umayyad caliph.⁷⁵⁷ Somehow, Leo III managed to back-talk him, and the caliph had his hand cut off. But thanks to the grace of the Mother of God, a new hand grew back in its place, and John used it to write his defence of the holy images.⁷⁵⁸ Of more importance to the discussion here is probably the fact that John

⁷⁵¹ Theophanes *Chronographia* AM 6215, Tabari, *Tārīḫ* II:1463, Mansi XIII:197. See Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm* 82 for a full diagram over the different traditions.

⁷⁵² Grabar summarised the main points of scepticism in his 1975 paper “Islam and Iconoclasm”, whereas a young Patricia Crone in her 1976 lecture “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm” claimed that “it would require a scepticism verging on the fideist” to deny any influence of Muslim beliefs upon Byzantine Iconoclasm. Hawting (1999) traced a deliberate rejection of Christian images in Early Islamic concepts of idolatry, whereas Grabar, again (“Byzantine Arts and Islam”), questioned the early Muslim understanding of images in general.

⁷⁵³ Barasch, *Icon* II.

⁷⁵⁴ Auzépy, *L’histoire des Iconoclastes* 169.

⁷⁵⁵ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm* 66f. Cf. Theophanes AM 6135 on the building of the Dome of the Rock after “the Jews” had told the caliph to take away the cross on the Olive mount in Jerusalem.

⁷⁵⁶ Krannich, Schubert, Sode, *Die Ikonoklastische Synode von Hiereia 754* 69 (Mansi XIII 356 C/D).

⁷⁵⁷ Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas* 71-85. The chronology of the legends is totally inconsistent.

⁷⁵⁸ Prof. Koder here brought my attention to an earlier *Canticle on the Assumption of the Virgin* (Anon., no. XI:15-16) in which a Jew who tries to attack the Virgin on her death-bed loses his hands, but regains them after becoming Christian. The “Virgin with three hands” is an iconographic prototype connected to the story of John.

seems to have written some of the earliest Christian refutations of Islam without ever connecting it to Iconoclasm.⁷⁵⁹ ‘Umayyad attitudes to figurative arts do not need to be further elaborated here; the caliphs might have refrained from ostentative depictions of humans and animals in their monuments and palaces, but their reign clearly represents the last flowering of Hellenistic arts.’⁷⁶⁰

Now, the “Orationes” of John of Damascus are no mere expressions of pious Christian devotion to images, they are some of the most philosophically sophisticated discourses on images written in a tradition that goes back to Plato. Moshe Barasch, who saw a general concern of figurative arts in his works, noted that “John may well be the first thinker in the Christian tradition to explicitly ask simple, naïve questions, such as what is a picture, and are there different types of images and what are they?”⁷⁶¹ The “simplicity” was perhaps not perceived by his contemporaries, for John begins his second oration by deploring the fact that his previous work was not understood by everyone.⁷⁶² It could be seen as a typically “Greek” characteristic to get entangled in philosophical arguments over a matter of religious reverence – that was how Crone polemically exemplified the main difference between Byzantine and Islamic Iconoclasm.⁷⁶³ But John of Damascus did clearly not write his orations out of a wish to show off with his philosophical skills, but urged by developments in the Christian church that might have had even less with philosophy to do.

Of the three orations, the first one is the longest and most poetically elaborate. Here, John describes how images are able to tell silent stories to the eye, educate the illiterate, and how their beauty brings even the learned man closer to God.⁷⁶⁴ The invisible God can never be depicted,⁷⁶⁵ but the signs of Him – like shadows or forebodings of His invisible

⁷⁵⁹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 485ff.

⁷⁶⁰ MacAdam, “Settlement and Settlement Patterns” 91; cf. Mundell, “Monophysite Church Decoration” 74.

⁷⁶¹ Barasch, *Icon* 188.

⁷⁶² John of Damascus, *De Imaginibus* 1284C.

⁷⁶³ Crone, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Iconoclasm” 82f.

⁷⁶⁴ Τί τούτων τηλαυγέστερον πρὸς ἀπόδειξιν, ὅτι βίβλοι τοῖς ἀγραμμάτοις αἱ εἰκόνες, καὶ τῆς τῶν ἁγίων τιμῆς ἀσίγητοι κήρυκες ἐν ἀήχῳ φωνῇ τοὺς ὀρώντας διδάσκουσαι, καὶ τὴν ὄρασιν ἁγιάζουσαι; Οὐκ εὐπορῶ βίβλων, οὐ σχολὴν ἄγω πρὸς τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν, εἴσειμι εἰς τὸ κοινὸν τῶν ψυχῶν ἰατρεῖον, τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ὡσπερ ἀκάνθαις τοῖς λογισμοῖς συμπνιγόμενος; ἔλκει με πρὸς θεάντης γραφῆς τὸ ἄνθος καὶ ὡς λειμῶν τέρπει τὴν ὄρασιν καὶ λεληθότως ἐναφίησι τῇ ψυχῇ δόξαν θεοῦ. John of Damascus, *De Imaginibus* 1268A-B.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 1238.

reality – can be found everywhere in nature and deserve respect.⁷⁶⁶ The physical world is not impure; that is a Manichean attitude.⁷⁶⁷ God commands man to show reverence for the earth like the prophet Daniel did for the Pagan king Nebuchadnezzar.⁷⁶⁸ As one devotes respect to the image of the emperor without claiming that the image is the emperor;⁷⁶⁹ so every image is part of an intricate hierarchy going back to the unfathomable *Urbild*.⁷⁷⁰

The second oration has a more gloomy atmosphere. It begins with a warning against Satan, the snake who fooled man into believing he could be like God.⁷⁷¹ Then it goes on to condemn the idols of the old Israel and to promote a “correct” understanding of the images with reference to Scripture, but most notably: it lashes out against Imperial efforts to take control over the church and refashion it. “The Manicheans wrote a new Gospel according to Thomas; you are writing a new Gospel according to Leo.”⁷⁷² It continues to demand respect for the physical objects of reverence, but its argumentation relies more on religious scripture than on philosophical arguments. In the third oration, a new understanding of the image is outlined.⁷⁷³ All orations end with lists of quotations from the Late Antiquity Church fathers; it is clear which tradition John belongs to, and it is striking how natural the everyday presence of images – secular and religious – had been to it, and how times seems to have changed.

Unfortunately, we know frustratingly little about how Iconoclasm unfolded except from through its adversaries. Cautious scholars have held that the most controversial thing Leo III possibly did in his reign was to remove the Christ *Pantokrator* over the Chalke gate, and recently, Auzépy has rejected even that as a myth.⁷⁷⁴ The traditional accounts claim that the actual Pandemonium took place under his son, Constantine V, remembered as the personification of all evils a Byzantine could think of, the convocator of the Hieria church

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 1242f.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., 1246D.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 1272C. This is a quotation from the anti-Jewish works of Leontius of Naples. Cf. Beck, *Von der Fragwürdigkeit der Ikone* 10f.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., 1262D. From the works of st. Basil.

⁷⁷⁰ Barasch, *Icon* 236.

⁷⁷¹ John of Damascus, *op. cit.*, 1285A.

⁷⁷² Ibid., 1303: Μανιχαίοι συνέγραψαν τὸ κατὰ Θωμᾶν εὐαγγέλιον· γράψατε καὶ ὑμεῖς τὸ κατὰ Λέοντα εὐαγγέλιον.

⁷⁷³ Ibid. 1337ff.

⁷⁷⁴ Auzépy, *L'histoire des iconoclastes* 177 (“la destruction de l’icône du Christ de la Chalcé par Léon III n’a jamais eu lieu, pour l’excellente raison que cette icône n’existait pas”). It should be noted that Auzépy has pursued an extremely sceptical line when it comes to John of Damascus too (ibid., 253-7).

council in 754 where Iconoclasm became theologically defined.⁷⁷⁵ The problem is that just because something is theologically defined, it does not actually mean that the whole issue is very much about theology at all.⁷⁷⁶ The “Parastaseis” seems to indicate that if Leo III had a negative attitude to images, they were not necessarily Christian;⁷⁷⁷ and as for the iconodules, their respect for Christian images are no hint to their attitudes towards images in general.⁷⁷⁸

One might throw a glance at the Caliphate during the same era. Figurative mosaics in Palestine and beyond show traces of having been distorted or destroyed in the eighth century, in a sporadic and incoherent way which does not conform with either official Byzantine policies on images, nor with what one might have expected from an official decree from the caliph: it was most probably made by the local Christian communities.⁷⁷⁹ Islamic repressive policies against the Christians aimed at the public manifestations of their faith, and particularly against the cross.⁷⁸⁰ This is a diametrically opposite attitude to the policy of

⁷⁷⁵ Krannich, Schubert, Sode, *Die Ikonoklastische Synode von Hierieia 754 29-69* for a compilation of the few acts which can be exhumed from the condemnation of Iconoclasm in 787.

⁷⁷⁶ The Hierieia council explicitly had to condemn acts of pure vandalism and greed, as people melting down sacred vessels under the pretext that their decorations were figurative. Ibid. 59 (Mansi XIII 329 D-E).

⁷⁷⁷ Cf. also foreg. 48-50 (Mansi XIII 277 C-D) where it is rhetorically asked how the Icon-painters dare to depict the Mother of God by means of *Pagan craft* (τῆ τοῦ Ἑλληνος ἀνογράψασθαι τεχνῆ; that is, the art of the ancient Greeks) ... *for when the demons hailed Jesus as God, he upbraided them, because it is unfitting for Him, being born witness of by demons* (ἀπαξιῶν ὑπὸ δαιμόνων ἀμαρτυρεῖσθαι).

⁷⁷⁸ The extremely iconodule Vita of Stephan the Younger (806) is outraged that Constantine V replaced icons with secular images, hunting scenes, plant motifs and portraits (cf. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* 152f), accusations that could be placed aline with insinuations that the same emperor was a neo-Pagan, a dragon, an Arab, a homosexual and so on (Rochow, *Konstantin V.* 133f.)

⁷⁷⁹ Shick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine* 209f, 218ff. Cf. also Nikolia, “Islamic Influences in the Iconoclastic Churches of Naxos”, where the stylistic factor seems to be the more important one, reminding of later centuries when “pseudo-Cufic” church decorations became commonplace in the Byzantine empire. Though that would be the topic of a completely different investigation, the basic aesthetic dimension in Byzantine and Islamic cultural exchanges during this era (cf. Setton, “On the Raids of the Moslems in the Aegean” 317f and Miles, “The Arab Mosque in Athens”) should not be ignored.

⁷⁸⁰ Cf 1.2.2 and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 104. Muslim attitudes to their Christian subjects are, of course, rarely coherent. In the later Slavonic vita of S. Constantine, it is stated that the great missionary, on a visit to the ‘Abbasid caliphate, saw how *on the outside of doors of all Christians they painted images of demons playing games and grimacing. And ... he said: “I see demonic images and assume that Christians dwell within. However, the demons are unable to live with them and flee from them. But wherever this sign is not present on the outside, the demons dwell with those inside”*. (transl. Kantor, *Vita Constantini* 35f)

official Byzantine Iconoclasts, who had crosses displayed everywhere.⁷⁸¹ On the other hand, the two contrahents seem to have another dimension in common, for if the Muslims feared some inherent power of the cross – or the images – it has also been suggested that the Arab menace triggered a religious panic in Constantinople where images became either suspected of offering the wrong protection or attracting the wrath of God.⁷⁸² Leo III is said to have scared the Arabs away with the cross, and it is known from an alleged Iconoclast, the mother of Theodore of Studion, that she preferred the protection of the cross to other alternatives in a world where any religious devotion conflated with magic and superstition:

She did not, like the other women, who, out of fear of demons, were used to put spells and incantations and other charms upon their newborn, and in their seats and cradles, overheaping them with magic necklaces and amulets; she found it sufficient to protect us with the sign of the life-giving Cross, which she held to be more impregnable than weapons and shields.⁷⁸³

So the Cross is seen as a protector against demons by the Christians, where it is seen as something demonic by the Muslims. Now, John of Damascus actually defends the images precisely because they do offer protection against demons;⁷⁸⁴ one would only need a Constantinopolitan report which says that images are demonic to complete the picture; and that is found not only in the “Parastaseis” but in several works throughout the Byzantine literature.⁷⁸⁵ There is even a very concrete example from another situation of dire distress:

⁷⁸¹ Cormack, “The Arts During the Age of Iconoclasm 35-42.

⁷⁸² Mango, “Historical Introduction” 3. Similarly, under Leo V the Armenian (813-20) the revival of Iconoclasm was defended with the argument that it ensured victory in war (cf. Crone on this topic, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Iconoclasm” 80).

⁷⁸³ οὐκ εἶπε τὸ ταῖς ἄλλαις γυναιξίν, οἷα ἐκεῖναι ἐπὶ τοῖς νεογόνοις εἰώθασι κατὰ δαιμονικὴν κίνησιν κεχρησθαι κληδονισμοῖς καὶ περιάμμασιν καὶ ἄλλαις τισὶν ἐπφδαῖς εἰς τε τοὺς δίφρους καὶ τοὺς κοιτωνίσκους, περιτραχήλιά τε βάλλουσαι καὶ περίαπτα, ἀλλ’ ἤρκειτο μόνον τῇ σφραγίδι τοῦ ζωποιοῦ σταυροῦ τετειχίσθαι ἡμᾶς, ἀντὶ ὅπλου τινὸς καὶ θυρεοῦ ἀμαχωτάτου τοῦτο προβαλλομένη, Theodor Stud. *Laudatio Funebri in Matrem Suam* 884f.

⁷⁸⁴ John of Damascus, *De Imaginibus* 1264A.

⁷⁸⁵ Mango, “Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder” 59ff., Brown, “Images as a Substitute for Writing” 23ff.

when the Crusaders sieged Constantinople in 1203–4, an angry Byzantine mob blamed Fidias' statue of Pallas Athena and destroyed it in a drunken rage.⁷⁸⁶

“What is an image?” is the question with which John of Damascus opens the debate, and his own answer is contained in the paradox that it makes something visible that does exist, yet cannot be seen.⁷⁸⁷ This definition has a problematic aspect in it, for just as in the case of “spiritual warfare”, the distinction between Good and Evil will lie in the eye of the beholder. If there is no common understanding for what an image “is”, there is no coherent answer to the question: it can be a god, an idol, a demon, a symbol or a talisman.⁷⁸⁸ In such a world, even the word “Iconoclasm” would lose its meaning, for if it is impossible to define an image, how do we define a breaker of images?

It has been suggested that the Iconoclasts were a kind of rationalists, like the Islamic Mu'tazila, whose main objection was with antropomorphism,⁷⁸⁹ and it is of course important to remember that Islamic opposition to images in no way made Islam more immune to irrational beliefs in the magical powers of the Qur'an, the miracles of the Prophet and so on.⁷⁹⁰ But even then, the theological connection is weak, for what Iconoclasts and Mu'tazilas happen to share is not a common vision of God but a scepticism towards His visibility in the world.⁷⁹¹ And as far as any coherent attitude towards images in Iconoclast Byzantium is discernable, it is hardly rational: the alleged Iconoclasts might better deserve – as has been suggested – the name *iconophobes*, people who fear images.⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁶ Nic. Chon. *Historia* 558-9 (738 Bekker).

⁷⁸⁷ Barasch, *Icon* 241-3.

⁷⁸⁸ Note that in his “letter” to ‘Umar II, Leo III does not express any Iconoclastic beliefs, but he accuses the Caliph of idolatry since Muslims worship the “Black Stone” (Jeffery, “The letter of Leo III” 322f.)

⁷⁸⁹ Haddad, “Iconoclasts and Mu'tazila”. Cf. Rochow, *Konstantin V.* 17.

⁷⁹⁰ van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* IV:630ff.

⁷⁹¹ Best summed up by Sebastian Brock: “The whole Iconoclast controversy has nothing at all to do with Christology ... It is, rather, a question of how far the divine is allowed to impinge on the human world ... To the Iconodules ... the divine was very much present in the world, and was not subject to neat barriers. They are in fact heirs of that tradition of spirituality that saw the worlds as a sacrament, and that allows for the transformation and transfiguration of matter by means of the spirit. If there is anything in this suggestion, it perhaps helps explain why Iconoclasts were far from consistent in their choice of areas to attack ...” Brock, “Iconoclasm and the Monophysites” 57. Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* IV:361ff.

⁷⁹² Rosenqvist, *Bysantinsk Litteratur* 55.

2.2.2. Problems of Confidence

Religion and State are brothers, and the one cannot be without its sibling. Religion is the foundation of the State and the State is its guardian; and what lacks a foundation, will be torn down, whereas that which lacks a guardian, will be lost.⁷⁹³

If later Byzantine chroniclers were unanimously hostile to Constantine V, he seems to have been held in almost religious esteem by some of his contemporaries, just like his father, Leo III, had once been received as the hero and saviour of Constantinople from the Muslim Arabs.⁷⁹⁴ Not only is Constantine V depicted in Armenian sources as the classical warrior-saint, killing dragons and lions from a horseback; contemporary legends would have it that he personally repaired the entire Valens aqueduct with his superhuman strength.⁷⁹⁵ Both perspectives say something crucial about the conflation of the hero and the ruler in the popular mind, but also about its inherent weakness.

Who is a ruler? According to a sociological rule of thumb, a king is someone who is considered king by others, but that might be too enlightened an explanation to use here.⁷⁹⁶ For Ibn Khaldun, power is something deriving from group solidarity (*ʿaṣabīya*) and prestige (*ḥasab*), but this is also too scientifically analytic an approach to the *topos* of the demon-killing superman-emperor.⁷⁹⁷ Now, in Ferdowsi's famous "Shahname" (Book of Kings) from the tenth century, it is stated that the ancient kings had a mark of sovereignty called *Farr*, a kind of Divine light or "halo" surrounding them, which signalled their alignment with the forces of nature and rendered them power and fortune.⁷⁹⁸ The three first kings of Iran, Keyumars, Hushang and Tahmuras, were all blessed by this miraculous *Farr* and they spent their reigns successfully fighting and eventually subduing the demons (*devs*) of

⁷⁹³ ad-dīnu wa-l-mulku iḥwāni lā ḡanīya li-wāḥidin minhumā min ṣāḥibihī fa-d-dīnu ʿussu l-mulk wa-l-mulku ḥārisuhū wa-mā lam yakun lahū ʿuss fa-maʿadūm wa-mā lam yakun lahū ḥārisun fa-dāʿin A famous statement attributed to the Sassanid Shah Ardashir I (221-237); here quoted by Masʿudi (*Murūğ ad-dāḥab* II:162).

⁷⁹⁴ Still Michael the Syrian describes Constantine as a cultivated man, who was merely hated by the Orthodox because of this (transl. Chabot XI:25 / 521).

⁷⁹⁵ Rochow, Kaiser *Konstantin V*. 127f.

⁷⁹⁶ It seems to derive from the political works of Leibniz, though I have been unable to trace it here.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima* 180ff.

⁷⁹⁸ As a matter of fact, Byzantine emperors were also depicted with haloes.

the world, forcing them to work for the humans.⁷⁹⁹ This theme already figures in the Qur'an, but there the demon-tamer is Solomon,⁸⁰⁰ who, like his father David, is also model for the riding warrior-saints in Judeo-Christian imagination.⁸⁰¹

At least one caliph liked to pride himself as a Holy Warrior, and that was a next-to-contemporary of Constantine V, the fifth 'Abbasid ruler Harun ar-Rashid.⁸⁰² He was not only the main architect of the border zone (*fūḡūr*) against Byzantium; as early as the age of 13 he embarked on campaigns against the Christian neighbour and continued with it to his death.⁸⁰³ It is unclear what he wished to gain from it, for by the reign of Constantine V – who recovered his father's hometown on the border to Syria in 746 – it must have become clear that Byzantium would not fall anymore.⁸⁰⁴ The probable explanation is that it was part of the image-building surrounding the young caliph, a wish to attain that rumour for holiness which was otherwise ascribed to the border warriors.⁸⁰⁵ But it also gives an interesting touch to the conceptualisation of the border wars against Byzantium as a war against demonic forces. Typically, Harun imitated 'Umar II by writing a polemical letter to Constantine VI.⁸⁰⁶

Harun's efforts largely seem to have been ignored except for by his own court poets.⁸⁰⁷ His name has become famous even in Western folklore, though, due to the role he takes in the stories of "Thousand and One Night", where he roams around incognito at night in Baghdad (a city he actually detested).⁸⁰⁸ Harun ar-Rashid is not alone about this, for Medieval Jewish tradition could tell similar stories about Solomon⁸⁰⁹ as could later Byzantines about the Iconoclast emperor Theophilus (829-42).⁸¹⁰ When Liutprand of Cremona visited Constantinople in the tenth century, he learned that Leo VI (886-912) had once been arrested and thrown in prison by city guardsmen for visiting the streets incognito after nightfall:

⁷⁹⁹ Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāme* 3-5.

⁸⁰⁰ Q 27:17ff, 34:12ff. But it is still the alignment with God which makes Solomon rule over the jinn, not his personal achievements.

⁸⁰¹ Walter, *The Byzantine Warrior Saint* 36f.

⁸⁰² Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 101ff; and *ibid.* "The Naming of the Frontier" 19ff.

⁸⁰³ Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate* 107f, 130f.

⁸⁰⁴ Ostrogorsky, *A History of the Byzantine State* 176.

⁸⁰⁵ Kennedy, *loc. cit.*, Bonner, *op. cit.* 96f. on the devastation of churches in the border zone.

⁸⁰⁶ Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 188, 199.

⁸⁰⁷ Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 131.

⁸⁰⁸ Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate* 115, 120.

⁸⁰⁹ Alexander-Frizer, *The Heart is a Mirror* 480.

⁸¹⁰ Diehl, "La Légende de l'Empereur Théophile". These legends are from the 12th century.

When they had left, the emperor called the prison guard to his cell and asked, “My friend, do you know the emperor?” – “How could I know him,” answered the man, “when I cannot imagine having ever seen him? At some public ceremonies, I have seen him when he passed by, but only from a distance (since I could not get close) and it seemed to me I beheld a miracle and not a man.”⁸¹¹

This story shows an inherent weakness of the ruler. He is, actually, not a hero at all: his marvellous powers derive from his *persona*, not from himself. Analytic Arab observers knew the Byzantine emperor to be rather insignificant as a person and easily replaceable if he proved himself to be weak or fell short to expectations.⁸¹² When the empress Irene blinded her son Constantine VI in 797 and appropriated the masculine title emperor for herself, they did not even bother to question whether this was logical (as opposed to the Frankish West, where it was used as a polemical pretext for declaring Charlemagne emperor in 800).⁸¹³

Both Muslim and Christian traditions seems to have connected the power and splendour of the emperor with magic and alchemy.⁸¹⁴ This conforms with the image of the ruler as a tamer of demons, but it also leaves room for suspicion: if the emperor is something else than he appears to be, the real man behind the mask might as well be a demon himself. According to Procopius, Justinian I, roaming the imperial palace at night, used to lose his human form and show himself as a formless piece of meat.⁸¹⁵ In the world of Ferdowsi, a similar *topos* is attached to the evil Zahhak, who terrorises Iran for a thousand years, hiding two man-eating dragons on his royal shoulders.⁸¹⁶ It is tempting to think of the almost

⁸¹¹ His itaque discedentibus, custodem imperator ad ses carceris vocans: “Φίλε μου” – inquit – Leonem imperatorem nostin?”. “Qui – inquit – noscere possim, quem vidisse me non meminerim? Ad publicum sane, raro quamquam, dum procedit, a longe (quia propter nequeo) cum intueor, mirabile quoddam et non hominem videre videor ...” Liutprand, *Antapodosis* I:11 (XX). The story ends with Leo convincing the guardsman to take him back to the Royal palace the next day, where the emperor is immediately recognised by the guards and people at the court. Interesting here is the astrological reflections interwoven with the story: Leo considers himself having been under a “bad star” when he left the palace; when he enters it again, he is under a “benign star”.

⁸¹² el Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* 88. Cf. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus* 1, 13f.

⁸¹³ Ibid., 90ff; Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 181, 185.

⁸¹⁴ Rochow, *Konstantin V.* 78ff, 86f, cf. Mango, “The Legend of Leo the Wise”.

⁸¹⁵ Procopius, *Anecdota* XII.

⁸¹⁶ Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāme* 6ff.

schizophrenic duality of the Isaurian emperors in Byzantine imagination, which within a generation would let their legacy as saint-like Christian warriors and protectors fall into oblivion and give way to a rage that went out even over their bodily remains.⁸¹⁷

If the individual ruler can be either a saviour or a demon in the eye of the individual subject, the only way to control them with reference to each other is a “community of values” to which they both adhere. But which is the nature of such a community? For the tribal Arab, dynastic legitimacy, not religion, remained the answer (and basically, Persian conceptions of rule are also dynastic).⁸¹⁸ Religion would set the literary boundaries for the community as a historical entity, but that does not necessarily apply on the local level. In fact, the bloodline gained importance even in Byzantium during this era: Heraclius was the first emperor whose title became inherited from father to son throughout five generations.⁸¹⁹ According to Ibn Khaldun, this is about as long as one might expect the prestige (*ḥasab*) of one family to last, given the psychological decline of rulers born to their position and their tendency to get out of touch with their subjects and enemies.⁸²⁰ Ferdowsi does not recognise such sociological facts, but retains the primitive conceptualisation of the superhuman individual when he explains how the fourth king of Iran, Jamshid, lost his power to Zahhak:

... the king, who had always paid homage to God, now became filled with vanity and turned away from Him in forgetfulness of the gratitude he owed Him ... the *Farr* departed from him and the world became full of discord. Men deserted his court and no one desiring repute would remain in his service, for when pride combines with power of action it brings ruin in its train and converts good fortune into bad.⁸²¹

The downbreak of confidence and the ensuing rule of demons is here symbolised by the disappearance of the divine light. What Ferdowsi does not claim is that the Iranian kingdom

⁸¹⁷ At the first restoration of the images in 787, a group of soldiers protested against the defamation of the then newly deceased Constantine V. At the second restoration in 843, the tomb of the same emperor was looted by an angry mob and the body burned in public. Rochow, *Konstantin V*. 123, 138.

⁸¹⁸ Meisami, *Persian Historiography* 10ff.

⁸¹⁹ Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 144.

⁸²⁰ Ibn Khaldun, *loc. cit.* Curiously enough, the ‘Umayyad, the Isaurian – and to some extent the ‘Abbasid and Amorio-Macedonian – dynasties all seem to apply to this, admittedly simplistic, rule.

⁸²¹ Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāme* 6. Cf. the madness of Nebuchadnezzar (*Dan*. 4).

disappears with the fall of Jamshid: as long as the geographic *durée* of Iran continues to exist, there is still an imaginative *Farr* waiting for someone to claim it, and it is just as natural that, after a thousand years of Zahhak's tyranny, Faridun comes to restore Iran to its former glory.

The idealised world of Ferdowsi is one of a fixed geographical and historical consciousness, and as such, it will be discussed in the subsequent chapters. It might serve as a sceptical reminder, though, when one approaches the conceptualisation of Byzantium as a historical entity whose emperor was always considered chosen by the Grace of God.⁸²² The alignment with the forces of nature and the terrestrial safety was risky business; they might have represented forces stronger and more reliable than the feelings of a disparate community, but it was to the latter the ruler became answerable as soon as the former were to fail him.⁸²³

⁸²² Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 245, contrasting this manifestation of absolute power (as put forward in the *Novellae* of Leo VI) with the preceding centuries during which the senate had been a more influential body within the empire (cf. developments after the death of Heraclius mentioned in 1.1.3).

⁸²³ It is noteworthy that Theophanes (AM 6218) connects the outbreak of Iconoclasm under Leo III with a volcanic eruption, just as he does with an earthquake and the anti-Christian measures of 'Umar II. It is perhaps not merely the need for scapegoats which is reflected in such actions, as a genuine fear that the forces of nature will fail the rulers lest they do something radically. The patriarch Germanos, who resigned from his post as the Iconoclast policies started, likened himself to the Prophet Jonah, who sacrificed himself to the stormy sea; that metaphor would only make sense if we assume that the patriarch, too, felt something was wrong.

2.3. Preliminary Observations (When does History become History?)

On July the 30th 762, a day considered fortunate according to astrological calculations, the caliph al-Mansur laid the foundations to a new capital, Baghdad, at the strategic crossroads of Mesopotamia, not far from the old Sassanian capital Ctesiphon.⁸²⁴ It has been interpreted as the symbolic seat of unified Islamic rule: the palace of the caliph situated in the centre of a round city,⁸²⁵ surrounded by four gates pointing in all directions of the world, the walls framing the separate quarters of the many peoples he claimed to rule – a “City of Peace” or a “New Babylon” which eventually became known under its pre-Islamic name.⁸²⁶

As Lassner points out, most of these interpretations rely more upon the bookish fantasy of modern historians than upon the limited epistemological field of the eighth century Arabs.⁸²⁷ It is not the wider “meaning” of the historical event which is of interest when we look upon it from ground perspective. On the other hand, it would be wrong to deny precisely this “meaning” once we try to understand it within a wider historical context. If the first part of this work relied upon a constructivist approach to the historical material; the second part has tried to follow a more structuralist method, looking for common patterns of reverence on both sides of the theological, cultural and political borders. Largely deriving from the overall historical silence of Anatolia, the Muslim *tūḡūr* and Constantinople in the Iconoclast era, the result should not be seen as a speculative effort to construct a new historical reality on basis of a scarce and scattered source material. Rather, it should serve to demonstrate its own inherent limitations with reference to universalist conceptualisations of history.

2.3.1. The Return of the Kings

The reignal names and epithets of the seven first Abbasid caliphs bear witness of Messianic expectations: as-Saffah, al-Mansur, al-Mahdi, al-Hadi, ar-Rashid, al-Amin and al-Ma'mun.⁸²⁸ Perhaps they worried about their own reputation in an Islamic world which still waited for an

⁸²⁴ Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate* 86f.

⁸²⁵ Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth* 150ff, Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 52.

⁸²⁶ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean* 64.

⁸²⁷ Lassner, *The Shaping of Abbasid Rule* 139-162.

⁸²⁸ Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 144f.

immediate end of the world⁸²⁹ – at least some popular views seems to have expected them to yield their power to a returning Jesus.⁸³⁰ But once the ‘Abbasids were in a dominant position and Jesus – or any saviour – did not show any signs of turning up, the result must have been a loss of religious credibility or a “secularisation” of their physical power.⁸³¹ More than six centuries later, Ibn Khaldun would offer a dry explanation to this phenomenon:

Kingship is the natural outcome of the group solidarity. It is not the consequence of a choice, but from essential necessity and the order of things ... All religious laws, all religions and everything which people use to practice together would be impossible without the group solidarity.⁸³²

Ibn Khaldun is a pious Muslim and eager to emphasise that this world is a mere station on the road to the next. But the world cannot be rejected just because it is temporary: even the religious person must acknowledge the circumstances which decide his ability to strive towards God. As single Believers assemble into communities, and the communities come together into empires, a common leadership is necessary to provide them with a strategic overview. Kingship manifests the larger reality of the religious group by the implementation of internal laws and rules or by the defense against external enemies. It does not mean that the Muslim kingship is a spiritual matter; that would endow it with a transcendental meaning which is unthinkable to the pious Muslim. If the worldly matters come to foreground for different reasons, even a pious caliphate might turn into a conventional kingdom, forced as it is compete with other kingdoms of the world; but it should only be considered impious if it would regarded this as its sole, self-referential purpose.⁸³³

Expanding the perspective of Ibn Khaldun, one could see the Islamic kingdom as a function of time: at the level of a moment, each Believer is striving towards God, but as a moment is prolonged into a life, his actions become a reality to his family, neighbours and local community; and as many generations survive and multiply, many different groups of

⁸²⁹ Crone, Hinds, *God's Caliph* 80 on al-Ma'mun appointing the eighth Shi'i imam ar-Rida'a as his successor.

⁸³⁰ Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 180ff. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 323f.

⁸³¹ See van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* IV:695-717 for a full summary on the theological implications.

⁸³² al-mulku ġāyatun ṭabī'iyatun li-l-°aşabīyati, laysa wuqū'uhū °anhā bi-ḥtiyārin °innamā huwa bi-ḍarūratī l-wuġūdi wa-tartībihī kamā qulnahā min qablu wa-°anna al-šarā'i wa-d-diyānāt wa-kulla °amrin yaḥmalu °ilayhi l-ġumhūru fa-lā budda fihi min l-°aşabīyati. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima* 257.

⁸³³ Ibid., and passim (the whole chapter dealing with “the transformation of the Caliphate into a Monarchy”)

believers – perhaps not only Muslims, but Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians included – must try to understand their common role within it. Time becomes space, a pluralistic society replaces the homogenous movement and the spiritual borderlands assume a physical character as they become part of a terrestrial universe.⁸³⁴ One should remember that of all the foes of Islam, Byzantium was the only one which had not magically “dissolved like salt in water”; in fact, it was from now steadily gaining in on the Muslims, which is mirrored in the strange respect payed to it by the Islamic apocalypticists (where the Byzantine attitude to the Arab neighbour remained one of distraught arrogance).⁸³⁵ A correlation between perspectives of time and space has been noted with reference to Christian apocalypticism.⁸³⁶

Perhaps more than unsated expectations, the identification of an universalist community with a physical universe is what puts apocalypticism at the stake.⁸³⁷ A spiritual reality is dependent upon a reality of spirits, and a religious society that wants to exist in the world must become less obsessed with destroying its forces than to establish a *modus vivendi* with them. As the “Long Eighth Century” drew to a close, the Twilight of the Gods had come to an end: the time was ripe for a return of the kings.

2.3.2. *The Persistence of Memory*

About the quarter of a century after the overthrow of the ‘Umayyads, a Syrian monk was writing a chronicle in the monastery of Zuqnin near present-day Diyarbakır. The manuscript, which found its way to Wadi Natrun in Egypt in the tenth century and from there to the

⁸³⁴ Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism* 174: “Just as Sunni scholars found themselves forced to accept governments that were less than ideal, they also found it necessary to justify social differences and inequalities. If it was essential to establish the legitimacy of government in order to ensure that the ‘ummah had not gone astray, it was at least equally important to demonstrate the correspondence of its social arrangements to divine intention ... the realisation of the egalitarian ideal was increasingly postponed to the next world.”

⁸³⁵ Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalypics* 315ff.

⁸³⁶ Meier, “Eschatologie und Kommunikation” 41-4, 70-3.

⁸³⁷ Zaman on the traditionalist acceptance of the present in view of the past, *Religion and Politics* 187; Cook on the waning of the Islamic apocalyptic tradition in the ninth century, *Studies in Muslim Apocalypics* 330. – It would, however, be self-fulfilling to suggest that the mid-eighth century marks a paradigmatic turning-point from which *all* apocalyptic expectations suddenly disappear: that would be to impose *one* long-time consciousness upon a multitude of perspectives that are all but consequent (cf. for instance Cook, *op. cit.* 44, esp. n37, and 127f. for comparisons on ‘Umayyads and ‘Abbasids in the apocalyptic sources).

Vatican Library in the eighteenth, was long known as the “Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tell Mahre”. It borrows extensively from earlier Monophysite history works, especially John of Ephesus, but adds a number of eyewitness accounts from the first decades of ‘Abbasid rule, apparently paralleled in the later Muslim “History of Mosul” by al-Azdi.⁸³⁸ It forms a negative counter-narrative to early ‘Abbasid history, describing the imposition of heavy taxes, appointment of corrupt bureaucrats, brutality of the militants and other afflictions wrought by the new rulers upon the civil society of Northern Iraq.⁸³⁹ The local identity of the chronicle surpasses the boundaries set by ethnicity and religion in a world where victims and oppressors alike are Christians and Muslims.⁸⁴⁰ But the Zuqnin chronicler also laments how Christians flocked to Islam after witnessing the prevalence of the caliphate:

If those who used to do such a deed (as apostasy) had numbered one, or one hundred, or one thousand ... I would have kept silent. But ... even without blows or torture people slipped toward [apostasy with] great eagerness, in groups of twenty, thirty, one hundred, two hundred or three hundred [men], without any compulsion [that led them?] to it. They used to come down to Harran, to governors, and apostise to Islam.⁸⁴¹

The chronologically and geographically narrow perspective of the Zuqnin chronicle presents us with a lesser *durée* where the actions and choices of the individual come to light. It might serve as a blueprint for the essentialist approach to history, where the acting individual

⁸³⁸ Cf. the introduction to the translation by Harrak.

⁸³⁹ On this process, see Kennedy, “Central Government and Provincial Élités in the Early Abbasid Caliphate”.

⁸⁴⁰ Zuqnin, *Chronicle* (transl. Harrak) 253*passim*. He calls the new rulers “Persians”, whereas the local Muslims are mostly defined as “Arabs”: (...*They [the Arabs] would beg them [the tax-collectors] to levy the tax in accordance with the law instituted by Muhammad, their guide and law giver, and by the first caliphs, that is to say, to collect in kind what each possessed ... the agents, however, did not agree to this and told them: “Go sell your goods as you like and give us what is ours: gold!”*; p260.) Reversely, on ‘Abbasid Christian officials partaking in sexual harrassment of their co-religionists among the civil population, cf. 302.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid. 324. Zuqnin’s only explanation is that it is all the work of Satan, and he continues to describe how the converts to Islam *grew different from the faithful people in both person and name; in person, because their once happy personal appearance became repugnant, in such a way that they were recognised by the intelligent ones through their persons, odour, and the look of their eyes*. The implication of demonic characteristics due to a change of community (cf. 2.1.1) is clear.

precedes the *Logos* (“im Anfang war die Tat”).⁸⁴² But it also demonstrates its inherent weakness, as the chronicler himself cannot find any wider “meaning” in the actions he witnesses, lest perhaps in the hope that it might be revealed by God sooner or later.⁸⁴³ Indeed, this era saw an important surge in Christian martyrology all over the Near east, with the purpose of glorifying the individuals who had died for their refusal to become Muslims, thereby actually demonstrating the rising awareness of Christian minority identities.⁸⁴⁴

Just like the disguised ruler, the borderland subject remains an elusive person, not due to of a lack of personality, but because he can be placed in *any* context. Abu Muslim al-Khurasani, the revolutionary leader who was eventually got rid of by the dynasty he had brought to power, can appear both as a pious Muslim warrior and a secret court intrigant;⁸⁴⁵ or turn into Ferdowsi’s blacksmith Kava, who leads the rebellion against Zahhak,⁸⁴⁶ until the modern historian deconstructs him.⁸⁴⁷ Anthony Bryer noted a similar incoherence in the picture of Digenis Akritas, and suggested that it hinted at a lack of common conviction among the Byzantine colonial warlords of Anatolia in the eleventh century.⁸⁴⁸ But this should not be interpreted as if the convictions of the acting subject is what “makes history”. Rather, it is the

⁸⁴² Goethe, *Faust* I:1224-1236.

⁸⁴³ Zuqnin, *Chronicle* (transl. Harrak) 273f: *If this persecution, in which Christians, pagans, Jews, Samaritans, worshippers of fire and sun, Magians, as well as Muslims, Sabians and Manichaeans were subjected together, had not been general, would gods or goddesses not have been extolled in this bitter persecution? But the matter concerned neither religion nor worship East or West. Terms such as “worshipping toward the South” or “worshipping toward North” had become irrelevant. If only Christians had been singled out in this persecution, I would have praised the martyrdoms of our days more than all those of the past ...*

⁸⁴⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 336-347. It is an interesting fact that there seems to be a perceived relationship between the departed whether he has died in the body or “merely” left his spiritual community: still today, Orthodox Jews use to hold funerals for family members who have abandoned their co-religionists.

⁸⁴⁵ Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory* 99ff., 107ff.

⁸⁴⁶ Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāme* 9ff.

⁸⁴⁷ Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* 153ff.

⁸⁴⁸ “I use the term ‘colonial’ deliberately, to refer to the way any imperial government or church in Constantinople viewed its provinces, whether the natives were Greek-speakers, Orthodox or not. It was an officialdom which provided patrons of the rock-cut churches of Cappadocia, who abandoned their post there after 1071, a century before the Seljuks actually took nearby Kayseri in 1168 ... the way in which he [Digenis Akritas] was subsequently presented may hint at why the Byzantine army and state which faced the Seljuks on the ‘colonial’ frontier at Mantzikert (Malazgert) in Armenia in 1071 also lacked conviction. For it is conviction which in the end gives other local Armenian and Turkish border heroes a dimension which *Digenes Akrites* lacks.” Bryer, “The Historian’s Digenes Akrites” p 102.

conviction of the historical narrative which is deciding for the way we regard his actions as part of a meaningful structure.⁸⁴⁹ As narratives meet each other over time and conflate into a bigger entity, textual criticism demands greater coherence: the historical universe expands from space to time.

An earlier chapter of this work encountered the continuation of a Late Antiquity educational culture among the ‘Umayyad and ‘Abbasid elites, to which Tarif Khalidi ascribed the first wave of ‘*Adab* Arab historiography.⁸⁵⁰ Developing parallelly with it, Arab *Hadith* historiography posed a decentralised alternative to official history-writing, emerging from the same oral narratives that would form the core of Islamic traditionalism.⁸⁵¹ Perhaps as a result from the semi-apocalyptic conviction that the world after Muhammad was, if not going to an immediate end, at least being in a constant state of degeneration,⁸⁵² it refrained from interpreting the events it documented, which made it unfit to cope with the demands from the imperialists who wanted to open a new chapter in Islamic history.⁸⁵³ Its formative function upon a common Muslim consciousness should not be underestimated – this is mirrored in the ‘Abbasid challenge to create a new “eye of the world” from which an universal Islamic history could be perceived as a meaningful entity.⁸⁵⁴ But there are strong reasons to assume that the traditionalists gained from the physical stability offered them by the caliphate.⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁴⁹ The *hadith* concept of history, detachable as it is into a number of single events and biographies, is painstakingly kept together by the self-regulating truth criterias of the *isnads*: they ensure that the Early Islamic history remains *one* narrative. As such, it is retroactively regulated, not an invisible “purpose” of the actors.

⁸⁵⁰ Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought* 89-96; cf. Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism* 176.

⁸⁵¹ Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* 24ff, 85-97.

⁸⁵² Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 187. The most famous – and latest – example of *hadith* history, the enormous “History of the Kings and Prophets” by at-Tabari, often quoted here, itself discloses eschatological convictions, though in an admittedly strained manner; as the author approaches his own time (the year 897-8), he angrily lashes out against a case of mock water warfare between some New-Year-celebrating inhabitants of Baghdad, calling it “one of Islam’s greatest troubles ever” and “reminiscent of the Antichrist” (*Tārīḥ* III:2163).

⁸⁵³ “As the history of the *umma* filled out to catch the winds, it was regarded with ever-increasing fascination by both the ruling elites and the literati as an imperial history on a par with the history of other great nations ... In order to see history in this broader, more universal perspective, *Hadith* was obviously ill equipped.” (Khalidi, 82). Cf. Meisami, *Persian Historiography* (which deals extensively with the dynastic forms of Persian conceptions of history after the downbreak of Abbasid power in the tenth century) 53ff, 281*passim*.

⁸⁵⁴ Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 99, Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* 96: “With early Abbasid *Adab* one gets the feeling that the audience has expanded, that whereas Umayyad *Adab* was essentially an elite phenomenon, cultivated in the courts of the caliphs, princes and powerful governors, Abbasid *Adab* was more diffuse, and also a more educationally structured activity.” Cf. also Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* 26ff.

Returning to the world of the Zuqnin monastery, one might consider the fact that the religious conversion, as well, could mean all or nothing in the long run.⁸⁵⁶ As the Christians of Iraq flocked to Islam, the Paulicians caused mass conversions in Anatolia, and somewhat later, the Bogomils would cause similar fuss in the Balkans.⁸⁵⁷ They came and died, not as the result from their own spiritual convictions, but because of the “greater world” which surrounded them. Centuries after the era surveyed here, the daughter of a victorious Byzantine emperor would witness the execution of the last Bogomil leader and describe how he, stubbornly refusing to give up his heresy, ended at the pyre in the Hippodrome:

... so thoroughly did the flame consume the Godless man, as if it, too, had been filled by rage towards him, that neither any odour of burned flesh was felt, nor any other strange kind of smoke was seen, but just a thin steam of damp in the middle of the pyre. For even the elements rise against the Godless; whereas they do not – to say the truth – touch those loved by God – like the fire once retracted and receded from the God-beloved youths of Babylon ...⁸⁵⁸

Anna Comnena illustrates precisely what we have to do with in the Borderlands: the spiritual realities are physical realities which are interpreted in a spiritual way. To the Byzantine princess, the religious enemy is no real person; possessed by his demons, he dissolves by himself, and his followers are physically saved by their decision to seek refuge with the victorious emperor.⁸⁵⁹ Although the ruler is still no divine person, his *persona* is God’s own

What Crone and Hinds noted on the ‘Abbasids and the rise of Islamic law, “a ruler who has no say at all in the definition of the law by which his subjects have chosen to live cannot rule those subjects in any but a purely military sense” (*God’s Caliph* 109) is correct, but they forgot to mention that this had been the case under the ‘Umayyads as well, when the subjects were non-Muslims who had *their* own perceptions of law.

⁸⁵⁵ Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 167ff, 180ff, 190ff. *Hadith* historiography laid particularly great emphasis upon the physical prevalence of Islam as a proof of its spiritual truth.

⁸⁵⁶ Shick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine* 139ff; cf. Morony, “The Age of Conversions”.

⁸⁵⁷ Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee* III-IV, Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 164-172.

⁸⁵⁸ Καὶ τοσοῦτον, ὥσπερ κατέ αὐτοῦ θυμουμένη, ἡ φλόξ διεβοσκήθη τὸν ἀσεβῆ ὥστε μηδὲ κνίσσαν τινὰ γενέσθαι μηδὲ καπνοῦ τινος καινοτομίαν ἑτέραν, ἀλλ’ ἢ μόνον λεπτήν τινα γραμμὴν καπνώδη φανῆναι κατὰ τὸ μέσον τῆς φλογός. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ τὰ στοιχεῖα κατὰ τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἐπαίρεται· φεῖδεται δέ, ὡς γε τάληθες εἰπεῖν, τῶν θεοφιλῶν, ὥσπερ ποτὲ ὑπεχώρει καὶ ὑπέικαθε τοῖς θεοφιλέσιν ἐκείνοις νεανίας ἐν Βαβυλῶνι καὶ περιέστεφεν αὐτοὺς τὸ πῦρ καθάπερ τις χρυσοειδὴς θάλαμος. Anna Comnena, *Alexias* XV:10.4.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, XV:10.1-3 and 5.

instrument and cannot be overthrown.⁸⁶⁰ On the other side of the emerging border, traditional Sunnism came to accept the imperial nature of the Caliphate because it assured the physical prevalence of their *'ummah*.⁸⁶¹ As a Muslim civil society proved able to sustain itself through the caliphate, even the most spiritually infuriated *homme revolté* would have to pay his denial of the physical world like the Byzantine heretic.⁸⁶²

The following quotation – a beautiful example of the kind of laconic black humour which makes up a common stylistic feat in early Arabic history writing – might serve to conclude the discussion:

“What is your opinion on Abu Muslim?” [the caliph al-Mansur] asked.

“If you have taken one single hair from his head,” [Ja’far ibn Hanzala] answered,

“you must continue to kill, and kill, and kill ...”

“God bless you!” al-Mansur said; “Look in this mat.”

When Ja’far saw the corpse [of Abu Muslim] in it, he said:

“Commander of the Believers, count this day as the first day of your caliphate.”⁸⁶³

⁸⁶⁰ Geanakoplos, *Byzantium* 17ff, 131ff.

⁸⁶¹ Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 188., Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth* 152ff.

⁸⁶² A famous example is al-Hallaj, who was executed by the ‘Abbasid caliph in 922 for his claim to be God (or “the Truth”). His reputation in Sufi tradition seems to derive from the paradox that his blasphemy *in* the physical world was also a denial *of* the truth of that world.

⁸⁶³ *ḍaḥāla* °ilayhi Ğa°faru bnu Ḥanzalata fa-qāla l-Manṣūru: mā taqūlu fi °amri Abī Muslimin fa-qāla: yā °amīru l-mu°minīna, °in kuntu °aḥḍata min ra°sihi šī°ratun fa-°qtul ṭumma °qtul ṭumma °qtul fa-qāla l-Manṣūru wafaqaka llāha hā huwa fi l-basāṭi fa-lammā nazara °ilayhi qatīlan qāla: yā °amīra l-mu°minīna, °udda hādā l-yawma °awwala ḥilāfatika. Tabari *Tārīḥ* III:116, et al.

3. Commonwealths

Islam made a shift eastwards with the Islamisation of Iran, the coming of the ‘Abbasids and the foundation of Baghdad, and to some extent the enmity between Byzantium and the Caliphate after that point returned to the symbolical tug of war which had already characterised the enmity between Rome and pre-Islamic Persia.⁸⁶⁴

Harun ar-Rashid had made two important gains from the *tuğūr*:⁸⁶⁵ apart from priding himself to be a *gāzī*-caliph and leader of the holy wars against Byzantium, centralised control of the border zone enabled him to keep peace in exchange for tribute, thus making the emperor appear as his submissive *ḍimmī*.⁸⁶⁶ Nikeforos I, who deposed Irene in 802 and put an end to the Isaurian dynasty, tried to oppose him and was promptly greeted with a haughty letter in which ar-Rashid addressed him as a “Roman dog”, initiating a war that led to the fall of Heraclea in 806.⁸⁶⁷ Some thirty years later, in 838, ‘Abbasid centralised warfare against Byzantium culminated in the capture of Amorion in the very heart of Anatolia – once the city where Leo III had been declared emperor and now hometown of the new imperial dynasty which had come to power in 820.⁸⁶⁸ The fall of the “Eye of Christianity”, as the Arab chroniclers bragged,⁸⁶⁹ provided Orthodox Christianity with one of the first important literary descriptions of Christians martyred for their refusal to adopt Islam.⁸⁷⁰

But legitimacy from *ḡihād* ideals might have posed as dubious an advantage to the stabilising caliphate as it represented a lasting threat to the Byzantine state; the fight for inner Anatolia was never profitable.⁸⁷¹ More alarming to Constantinople was the loss of the Balkans to the Slavs and the Bulgars, a process which had taken place almost parallelly with the rise of Islam and which appears to have been far more cataclysmic, despite – or perhaps

⁸⁶⁴ Gibb, “Arab-Byzantine Relations” 59f.

⁸⁶⁵ Though short-lived: Bonner, “The Naming of the Frontier” 19ff.

⁸⁶⁶ Tabari, *Tārīḡ* III:696.

⁸⁶⁷ el Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* 94ff. Arab tradition ascribed an Arab origin to Nikephoros just as it had done with Leo III (possibly another reason to take the “Syrian” origin of the latter with a pinch of salt).

⁸⁶⁸ Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 208.

⁸⁶⁹ Tabari, *Tārīḡ* III:1236. It is said that it was chosen as a deliberate revenge for a previous Byzantine campaign into the *tuğūr* at which more than a thousand Muslim civilians had their eyes put out (*ibid.*, 1234).

⁸⁷⁰ Cf. Kolia-Dermitzaki, “The Forty-two Martyrs of Amorion”, who argues that it did not take place until 845.

⁸⁷¹ Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 138.

proven by – the fact that we know so little about it.⁸⁷² It was in Bulgaria, not at the Arab frontier, where Nikeforos I had to pay with his life in 811, and for more than a century, Constantinople stood under the immediate threat from its northern neighbours.⁸⁷³ This further emphasised the challenge of the Frankish empire to Byzantine legitimacy in the West,⁸⁷⁴ a development which the caliph was quick to note: in 801, Harun ar-Rashid sent a famous embassy to Aachen, presenting Charlemagne with exotic gifts of friendship.⁸⁷⁵

Youval Rotman has suggested that the rise of the Islamic Commonwealth spurred the Byzantines to establish their own commonwealth in the Balkans.⁸⁷⁶ In fact, it can seem like a paradox that Byzantium became sandwiched between two universalist empires, whose threat was first and foremost conceptional, whereas its own universalism was eventually adopted in precisely that region from which it had been most physically threatened. Within two centuries, military victories on the Balkan frontier would enable the empire to give a terrifying answer to its northern enemies,⁸⁷⁷ but the formation of an Orthodox Christian civil society that looked upon the prosperous Christian empire to the south as its prototype is a process that as less as the Islamisation of the Near East can be understood in exclusively military or ideological terms.⁸⁷⁸ Isaurian Byzantium, perhaps the most direct answer to jihadist Islam, had been a defensive and introspective fraction of its Roman predecessor, and its cultural impact proved to be historically limited.⁸⁷⁹ It is a far cry from the Byzantium described in the later “Russian Primary Chronicle”, in which an embassy is sent by Vladimir, prince of Kiev, to investigate which religion the Slavs should adopt:

⁸⁷² Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 77ff, 81: “The destruction wrought by the Slavs in the Balkans was extensive and thorough. The cities of the interior were sacked; the Roman and Byzantine administrative machinery totally collapsed; the network of bishoprics established since the fourth century in the principal cities of Illyricum was almost wholly uprooted, and the once flourishing Christianity of this region extinguished for several centuries; whole stretches of the countryside were emptied of their inhabitants who, when they escaped the slaughter, either fled or were deported in thousands to regions north of the Danube ...”

⁸⁷³ Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 183-196. Nikephoros himself caused great disruptions in Anatolia, whose inhabitants he moved to the Balkans *en masse*, a colonising effort which was heartily disliked by Theophanes (*Chronographia* AM 6302).

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 196-200. In 813, Michael I officially confirmed Charlemagne’s right to the imperial title.

⁸⁷⁵ Fletcher, *Ein Elefant für Karl den Großen* 59f.

⁸⁷⁶ Rotman, “Byzance face à l’Islam arabe” 782f.

⁸⁷⁷ Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 275ff.

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 274, 360ff. Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth* 165f.

⁸⁷⁹ Whitton, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* 159-64.

The Bulgars bow down and sit, and look hither and thither, like men possessed; and there is no joy among them, but only sorrow and a dreadful stench. Their religion is not good. Then we went to the Germans, and we saw them celebrating many services in their churches, but we saw no beauty there. Then we went to the Greeks [i.e. to Byzantium], and they led us to the place where they worship their God; and we knew not whether we were in heaven, or on earth: for on earth, there is no such vision nor beauty, and we do not know how to describe it; we know only that there God dwells among men.⁸⁸⁰

The notion about a cultural superiority, as suggested here, is as old as history itself in any literary sense: it puts the “primal scene” of the eyewitness within an aesthetic field of power, which is, however, itself dependent upon the “community of values”.⁸⁸¹ The imperial splendour of Constantinople is attested by many Western and Muslim ambassadors to the capital, but whereas these representatives of competing cultural commonwealths were expected to stay indifferent or at least show no sign of being impressed,⁸⁸² the Russian envoys – allegedly lacking a comparable answer – are retrospectively supposed to have dropped their weapons and, so-to-say, have become Byzantines on the spot.⁸⁸³

It was noted in the previous part of the work how the foundation of Baghdad can be received on two entirely different levels: one of immediate importance to the people who witnessed it, and one of concern to the historian who tries to understand it within a larger pattern. Sceptics such as Lassner are completely right to point out that the limited context of reception in the early ‘Abbasid world hardly justifies fanciful interpretations on the round shape of Baghdad as a result of Zoroastrian cosmology or Buddhist mandalas.⁸⁸⁴ But the real

⁸⁸⁰ Transl. from *ibid.*, 253.

⁸⁸¹ Bourdieu, *Praktische Vernunft. Zur Theorie des Handelns* (transl. of *Raisons Pratiques. Sur la théorie de l’action*, Paris 1994) Frankfurt 1998 211ff. This is of course precisely what echoes in the famous thesis of Henri Pirenne, according to which *his own* cultural ancestors (the Latinised Franks) had become assimilated by the “culture supérieure” of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean.

⁸⁸² el Cheikh, *Byzantium viewed by the Arabs* 84ff; cf. Liutprand, *Antapodosis* VI:5 (“nullo sum terrore, nulla admiratione commotus, quoniam quidem ex his omnibus eos qui bene noverant fueram percontatus”).

⁸⁸³ From a retrospective of almost three centuries (Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 254f).

⁸⁸⁴ Lassner, *The Shaping of Abbasid Rule* 169-83. The “Buddhist” connection seems to be derived from the fact that the Barmakids had been keepers of a Buddhist shrine in Transoxiana, and that the ground plan of Baghdad

fault of such interpretations lies in the delusion that the foundation of Baghdad, as well as the whole process of establishing ‘Abbasid imperial rule, was something intentionally *conceived* in a corresponding manner to how it was *received*.⁸⁸⁵ The interesting aspects of ‘Abbasid Baghdad and Byzantine Constantinople alike are their living symbolical role in literary memory and imagination,⁸⁸⁶ their rumour for splendour, magic and power, and their alleged universal messages to the world – self-fulfillingly echoed in the modern interpretations – which unintendedly make them outlive their founders in a way that the latter might have found totally incomprehensible.

All this does in no way diminish the meaning of precisely the literary imagination to the emergence of cultural identities which look back upon the “illusion of a common past”.⁸⁸⁷ However, as has already been noted with reference to the inner-Byzantine reception of the imperial image, the coercion of “despotic and infrastructural power” derives neither from the top nor from the ground of the social hierarchy but is decided by the technical and practical circumstances encompassing them both.⁸⁸⁸ The spread of a Byzantine “consciousness” required not only a wide network of communications able to transgress the more immediate physical and historical realities, but also a common interest to use them.⁸⁸⁹ There are always such practical issues at play where literary illusions are created, for once we leave the reality of spirits, we cannot rely on magic anymore.⁸⁹⁰

was first laid out with ashes. But much remains legendary, and should remain so. Lassner’s own attempt to a minimalist interpretation is unsatisfying (cf. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 52f n42) because it excludes later “meanings” and efforts to re-identify the city with new historical contexts.

⁸⁸⁵ Crone, Hinds, *God’s Caliph* 56-7, 58passim.

⁸⁸⁶ Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 372ff. In this case, a matter of historical-literary adherence would echo still in the struggle between Catholic Scandinavia and Orthodox Russia in the 14th century.

⁸⁸⁷ Cf. recent article by Kaldellis, “Historicism in Byzantine Thought and Literature”.

⁸⁸⁸ Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 199; cf. 163ff on caliphal support to *hadīth* collectors.

⁸⁸⁹ Piltz, *Det levande Bysans* 77ff.

⁸⁹⁰ A story which is today widely known under the name “The Emperor’s New Clothes” derives from a 14th-century Andalusian collection of folktales, *Libro de los enxiemplos del Conde Lucanor et de Patronio*, many of which have Arabic origin (cf. Wacks, “Reconquest Colonialism and Andalusī Narrative Practice in Don Juan Manuel’s *Conde Lucanor*.” *Diacritics* 36.3-4:2006). It is a story which takes the important step from considering the *persona* of ruler as the result of taming demons, to revealing it as a social construction. Typically, the illusion is disclosed by an outsider who is lacking the requirements for seeing the “primary scene” as something else than what it “is”: in the original story, it is a black slave who takes the place of the little boy.

3.1. Cultural Capitals

[The caliph] al-Ma'mun saw in a dream something like a man who was white in colour, red in appearance, with close eyebrows, bald head, blue eyes and good in character, sitting on his bed. al-Ma'mun said: "In his presence, I was filled with fear, and I said: 'Who are you?' He replied 'I am Aristotle.' I was pleased with him and said: 'Oh wise man, can I ask you something?' He said: 'Ask.' I said: 'What is good?' He said: 'What is good in the mind.' I said: 'And what after that?' He said: 'What is good in the law.' I said: 'And what after that?' He said: 'What is good in the society.' I said: 'And what after that?' He said: 'After that? There is nothing after that.' ... I said: 'Give me some advice.' He said: 'whose advice is gold, should be like gold to you. And be you with the unity of God.'⁸⁹¹

In the eighth century, when the Arabisation of the Christian communities in Egypt, Syria and Iraq was completed, popular Islam was challenged by Christians who had preserved the rhetorical techniques of their Late Antiquity predecessors, and who often became admired by their Muslim opponents for their argumentary skills.⁸⁹²

According to Dmitri Gutas, the translation of Aristotle's "Topica" from Syriac to Arabic – which was commissioned by the caliph al-Mahdi around the year 782 – should be seen in light of the rising role of religious polemics.⁸⁹³ Josef van Ess emphasised the emerging role of intellectualism in Islam as a result of the number of non-Arab converts who brought with them the philosophical and theological discourses that had once put their imprints upon Christianity since Late Antiquity.⁸⁹⁴ What is clear is that within a few decades after it was

⁸⁹¹ al-Ma'mūn rā'ā fī manāmihī ka-anna raḡulan abyad al-lawni mašraban ḥamrata wāsi'a l-ḡabhāti muqarūna l-ḥāḡibi 'aḡlaḥa r-ra'si 'ašhala l-aynani ḥusna š-šamā'ili ḡālisun 'alā sarīriḥi qāla l-Ma'mūnu wa-ka-annī bayna yadayhi qad mala'tu lahā haybatan fa-qultu man anta qāla 'anā Aristālīsu fa-sarartu bihī wa-qultu 'ayyuhā l-ḥakīmu 'as'aluka qāla sal qultu mā l-ḥusnu wāla mā ḥusnun fī l-aqli qultu tumma mā dā qāla mā ḥusnu fī š-šarī'a qultu tumma mā dā qāla mā ḥusnu 'inda l-ḡumhūri qultu tumma mā dā qāla tumma lā tumma (wa-fī riwāyatīn 'uḥrā) qultu raddanī qāla man naṣaḥaka fī d-ḡahabi fa-la yakun 'indaka ka-d-ḡahabi wa-'ilayka bi-t-tawḥīdi. al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 243.

⁸⁹² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 454ff.

⁸⁹³ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 61-74.

⁸⁹⁴ Griffith, "Byzantine Orthodoxy in the world of Islam", van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* I:423ff.

founded, Baghdad had turned into a leading centre of theological discourse in an increasingly pluralistic Islamic world, similar to Constantinople of the Late Antiquity church fathers,⁸⁹⁵ and interestingly, the Christological debate, which had put its imprints upon the Byzantine church for so many centuries, now reappeared in a somewhat different form, focusing upon whether the Qur'an was created or uncreated.⁸⁹⁶

'Abbasid intellectualism, and the translation of ancient Greek works to Arabic, has often been misinterpreted by the imposition of anachronistic meanings upon the categorisations used above.⁸⁹⁷ It has already been discussed at length how the integration of a civil and urban Roman-Christian *oikoumene* forced the 'Umayyads to muster a corresponding answer to their values, symbols and narratives. Greek secretaries were active into the 'Abbasid era;⁸⁹⁸ when Harun ar-Rashid made off with the mighty Barmakid family in 803, the formation of a more Persian-orientated state bureaucracy with Iranian roots was already under way.⁸⁹⁹ Most important, however, is the fact that Islam had ceased to be an elitist Arab phenomenon: it was now a faith transcending all social levels and ethnical groups in the empire. It meant that the hierarchic distinctions which form the spine of a stable pluralistic empire now had to be sought within the boundaries of Islam itself.⁹⁰⁰

Bulliet has said that the term "aristocrat" is neither helpful nor adequate to describe the social situation under the 'Abbasids, preferring the term "patricians" when he discussed the upper class families of urban Khurasan.⁹⁰¹ One might perhaps bring a meritocratic aspect into the issue: the exclusiveness of the learned Zoroastrian elites in Iran was an Islamic point of criticism against a pre-Islamic culture where knowledge had been inaccessible for the common people.⁹⁰² On the same time, Sassanid Persia had made it a

⁸⁹⁵ Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 161.

⁸⁹⁶ Most notably in the anti-Mu'tazili works of Ibn Kullab (van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 180-95).

⁸⁹⁷ Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* 170-5.

⁸⁹⁸ Cf. Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6251.

⁸⁹⁹ Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate* 101f, 115ff.

⁹⁰⁰ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 69ff.

⁹⁰¹ Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur* 20: "Aristocracy ... has too secular an overtone to fit well the predominantly religious families which were in many ways the most important component of the group. Elite, on the other hand, does not convey the important element of heredity that characterised the group. 'Religious class,' which I used on previous occasions before hitting upon the word patriciate, mirrors the difficulty of aristocracy by excluding the secular dimension." Cf. further 28-46.

⁹⁰² As van Ess noted, this has remained an issue of controversy in the Islamic world to this day (*Theologie und Gesellschaft* IV:708: "Bis heute ist das Problem der Delegation von Macht und Verteilung von Staatsgewalt in

policy to acquire “foreign” knowledge, which according to Zoroastrian doctrine was actually Persian and thus merely “repatriated” when translated to Pahlavi.⁹⁰³ Similar notions would have provided the new ‘Abbasid elites with the pretext for translating scientific and philosophical works into the language of Islam, paradoxically making that seem like an egalitarian concern which was the rise of Arabic as a cultural language and of Islam as a culturally competitive faith. Elitism still followed hereditary patterns, but it could justify itself by the dedication to common cultural and intellectual values of the rising Islamic society.

The son of Harun ar-Rashid, al-Ma’mun, later became famous for having tried to re-define Islam according to the principles of the rationalists, or Mu’tazilas. It must be emphasised, though, that these “rationalists” – famous for combining Muslim theology with Aristotelean philosophy – were just as heterogenous as their “traditionalist” opponents, and it was rather the caliphal effort to control Islam (the so-called *miḥna*) than doctrine itself which caused a polarisation of the religious society.⁹⁰⁴ The decree of al-Ma’mun expresses open disdain for the “riffraff” among the common people which flocked around traditionalist preachers, believed in the supernatural force of the Qur’an and denied free will.⁹⁰⁵ When the successor of al-Ma’mun, al-Mutawakkil, made an end to the *miḥna* in 848, the traditionalists – most notably the Shari’a law school founder Ibn Hanbal – could count on popular support by depicting themselves as victims of state persecution, and even anti-Mu’tazili scholars who had been tolerated by the *miḥna* – such as Ibn Kullab or Muhasibi – were branded as collaborators.⁹⁰⁶ Yet the religious debate continued, as the decentralisation of the caliphate gave way to a rich Islamic commonwealth of many different social and cultural tastes.⁹⁰⁷

What is important to note here is that it was not intellectual arguments and theological dogma that *caused* the social distinctions or factionary strife of the ‘Abbasid empire; they were part of the justification, or even concealment, of the social strife itself, creating an Islamic battleground where distinctions were encouraged but kept together by a common religious language. In the world of a civilian bureaucracy, whose ceremonial swords

der islamischen Welt noch nicht befriedigend gelöst”); neither could any absolute egalitarianism form the basis for a functioning state (Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism* 88ff).

⁹⁰³ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 34-45.

⁹⁰⁴ Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 145, 202.

⁹⁰⁵ Haddad, “Iconoclasts and Mu’tazila” 298.

⁹⁰⁶ van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 199.

⁹⁰⁷ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 166ff.

had been replaced by ceremonial pens, external aggression had to be sublimated within,⁹⁰⁸ and it was a logical consequence that the truth of Islam would be defended, not merely by the *techne* of its warriors or the *sophia* of its spiritual mystics, but by the *episteme* (knowledge or understanding), *phronesis* (judgement) and *nous* (intellect) of its intellectuals.

The intellectualisation soon extended to the world outside, and the symbolical war against Byzantium came to focus upon the “irrational”, “backwards” and “barbarian” nature of the Christian faith.⁹⁰⁹ When the Baghdadi booktrader Ibn al-Nadim compiled his famous *Fihrist* a century later,⁹¹⁰ the cultural superiority of Islam was overtly stated with reference to Byzantium, and Mas’udi went so far as to deny the relationship between the ancient Greeks and the Byzantines:

... (some claim that) the Greeks originated from the Romans ... a conclusion derived from their shared geographical and historical circumstances. There is a similarity between them, and their kinsmen did share certain characteristics and beliefs in the past, and because of that, some have made the mistaken conclusion on their origin to assume that they also shared a common ancestor. The truth, when you examine it, is that in their way of speaking, the Romans follow the language and literary style of the Greeks, but they have never achieved the same level of purity and eloquence. The language of the Romans is inferior to that of the Greeks and they are also weaker in their ways of speaking and expressing themselves, and even in their manners of public address.⁹¹¹

⁹⁰⁸ Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism* 99, 162f, 170.

⁹⁰⁹ Cf. Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist* 241: *Philosophy appeared among the Greeks and Romans before the religious code of the Messiah, for whom be peace. When the Byzantines became Christians, they prohibited it. Some of the books about it they burned, but some they treasured. They, moreover, prevented people from speaking about anything in philosophy which was against prophetic doctrine.* (transl. Dodge 579).

⁹¹⁰ Robinson, *Arabic Historiography* 3f.

⁹¹¹ ... inna l-yunānīyīna yunāsībūna ʾilā ḥaiṭu tanāsaba r-Rūm (wa-yantamīna ʾilā ḡaddihim ʾIbrahīma) li-anna d-diyāru kānat muštarikatan wa-l-muqāṭīnu wa-l-mawāḍiʿu kānat mutasāwiyatan wa-kāna l-qawmu qad šarikū l-qawma fī s-saḡiati wa-l-marḥabati fa-li-ḡālika ḡalaṭa man ḡalti fī n-nisbi wa-ḡaʿala l-ābian wāḥidan wa-hāḡā ṭarīqu ṣ-ṣawābi ʿinda l-mufattišīna wa-sabīlu l-baḡṭi ʿinda l-bāḡiṭīna wa-r-Rūmu qaffat fī luḡatihā wa-wuḡūʿi kutubihā l-yunānīyīna fa-lam yašīlū ʾilā kunhi faṣāḡatihim wa-ṭalāqati s-santihim wa-r-Rūmu ʿanqaṣa fī l-lisāni min al-yunānīyīna wa-ʾaḡafu fī tartībi l-kalāmi llāḡi ʿilayhi nahḡun taʿbīrihim wa-sunani ḡaṭābihim. Mas’udi, *Murūḡ ad-daḡab* II:242.

But, beyond polemics, was cultivation in Byzantium that low? Opinions on this topic range from a pessimistic emphasis upon the lack of sources, signs of educational decline and the absence of books in the empire,⁹¹² to more optimistic attempts.⁹¹³ There is no room here for discussing the role of Aristotelean logics to the rising Iconodule movement of the ninth century,⁹¹⁴ though it has some interesting parallels in both Mu'tazili and anti-Mu'tazili works from the 'Abbasid era.⁹¹⁵ The 'Abbasids might have turned to the Christian monasteries when searching for translators and manuscripts;⁹¹⁶ but precisely the monasteries had experienced the most devastating tensions with the ruling elites of Iconoclast Byzantium.⁹¹⁷ Since 813, a new group of Anatolian adventurers fought for the imperial office; first and foremost Leo V, an Armenian who initiated the second, more well-documented period of Iconoclasm, and to whom the first Byzantine historiographer in almost two centuries, Theophanes Confessor, fell victim.⁹¹⁸ Leo was challenged by his earlier comrade-in-arms Thomas, who had support from the caliph, but both of them were ousted by the Amorion Michael, who, once in power, earned himself the reputation of a barely educated "*brute imperial*".⁹¹⁹

Of course the wranglings of the military elites say nothing about the intellectual climate in the empire's civil society (and as a matter of fact, the 'Abbasid caliphate went through a devastating war of brothers at the very same time).⁹²⁰ The new Iconoclast patriarch, John Grammaticus, was a highly learned man who became demonised by his iconodule opponents later on.⁹²¹ It is noteworthy, though, that his princely pupil Theophilus, the son of Michael II – who grew up to be the Byzantine fairy-tale emperor *par preference* – developed a particular taste for Islamic arts and culture and re-fashioned several imperial palaces in Constantinople after Near eastern patterns.⁹²² The curious swapping of roles in cultural influx, compared to the 'Umayyad era, was probably a cause of gnawing discomfort to the emperor

⁹¹² Mango, "Books in the Byzantine Empire" 31.

⁹¹³ Cf. Mullet, "Writing in Early Byzantium".

⁹¹⁴ Parry, *Depicting the Word* 52ff.

⁹¹⁵ Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law* 389, 392.

⁹¹⁶ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 136ff.

⁹¹⁷ Martin, *A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* 54f.

⁹¹⁸ Theophanes Continuatus (who takes over the pen at this point) *Hist.* 29f.

⁹¹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 42, and Zonaras, *Epitomae* III:337f, who both state that Amorion was a city "in which Jews and Athinganoi and all kinds of impious people are numerous".

⁹²⁰ Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate* VIII-IX.

⁹²¹ Lillie, *Die Patriarchen der ikonoklastischen Zeit* 170ff.

⁹²² Ricci, "The Road from Baghdad to Byzantium" 132ff.

himself, who sent the patriarch with an embassy to Baghdad in 830, “desiring to show them [the Arabs] the riches of the Roman emperor”.⁹²³

The alleged cultural inferiority of Byzantium in the early ninth century can be explained from a multitude of far more practical reasons than the “backwardness” of Christianity or the “barbarism” of its emperors: if anything, the cultural dip of the Iconoclast era must be seen in light of the exhausting struggle for the empire’s political survival.⁹²⁴ According to the calculations of Treadgold, the budget of Byzantine state revenues under Theophilus’ widow Theodora (842-56) might have amounted to about a seventh of that of the Caliphate.⁹²⁵ The loss of the Near East had brought an economic shock to the empire which was still felt in Constantinople. But the Near East had also been one of the most dynamic parts of the Late Antiquity world and it seems just as natural that its cultural capital would accumulate elsewhere once it had been integrated with the world of Islam.

3.0.1. Remarks

The cultural achievements of the ‘Abbasid era were not the result from *one* “culture” imposing itself upon other cultures, but from the “agonistic” struggle of a heterogeneous society kept together by common fields of interest.⁹²⁶ The outcome was dynamic, even if the underlying motivations were crass; that is the mechanism of any “cultural capital”.⁹²⁷ Hardline Islamic traditionalists countered it simply by refusing to counter it at all: they declined to take part in any public debates and so alienated *themselves* from the social play.⁹²⁸ And yet it was the sublimation of the inner social struggle which earned Islam a more valuable spoil than it could have taken in a war: a broad-ranging cultural and literary activity that would leave its imprints upon a posterity that came in contact with its ubiquitous achievements.

⁹²³ ἐπιδείξασθαι σφίσι τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς βασιλείας Ῥωμαίων; Johannes Zonaras, *Epitomae* III:361.

⁹²⁴ Rosenqvist, *Bysantinsk Litteratur* 54f.

⁹²⁵ Treadgold, *Byzantine State Finances in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* 61.

⁹²⁶ I have borrowed this term from Chantal Mouffe’s recent essay *On the Political* (2005). *Agon* (Gr.: struggle) is here juxtaposed to the *ant-agonism*. The emergence and disappearance of *common* values can not be seen as the result of a single intention, but result from a game to whose rules the internal power itself is committed.

⁹²⁷ Cf. Bourdieu, *op. cit.* (above, n881) 182ff, 186ff.

⁹²⁸ Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 214ff.

3.2. Renewal?

Since long, Time has become old and born no youthful offspring from which it could feel exalted through a new season of bloom: acclined to its ancient habits, but having neither found a way to renew the splendour nor its inborn nobility, it has kept turning around itself in cyclic repetition, priding itself with those ways of old, whose outcome was already marked by anticipation, and which did not render it the grace to flourish and rejuvenate. But now, thanks to one man, pious, fresh and noble in his deeds, it can again take pride in the youth of its children, and put aside the grumpiness of the old man ...⁹²⁹

In January 842, the emperor Theophilus died and Byzantine Iconoclasm came to end. Under the imperial widow Theodora, her brother Bardas and the still young Michael III, the council of 815 was abolished and the Nicaea council of 787 reconfirmed, an event still commemorated as the “triumph of Orthodoxy” in the Eastern Christian world.⁹³⁰ It took some twenty-five years, still, before the patriarch Photius could celebrate the new apsis mosaic in Hagia Sophia, the image of the Virgin *Theotokos* with the infant Christ which can still be admired there.⁹³¹ That same year, his homily on the victory over the “heresy of heresies”⁹³² would go beyond the realms of theological dogma, describing a re-awakening of Byzantine culture, the renaissance of a glorious past.

The “renaissance before the renaissance”, as this is sometimes described, is of course itself the renaissance of a literary *topos*: because we are accustomed to the notion about the Western Renaissance as a renaissance of the pre-Medieval culture, we can also “recognise”

⁹²⁹ Ἦν ἄρα ἐκ πολλοῦ γεγηρακῶς ὁ χρόνος καὶ νέαν οὐκ ἔχων ὠδῖνα, καθ' ἣν ἀκμάζων ἐθάρρει σεμνύνεσθαι, μόναις δὲ ταῖς παλαιαῖς ἐγκεκυφῶς ἐκείναις καὶ λαμπρὸν οὐδὲν οὐδὲ γενναῖον εἰς τόκον ἔχων νεανιεύσασθαι, τὰ αὐτὰ φέρων κύκλω περιήει στρεφόμενος, ἐκείνων μόνῃ τῇ φορᾷ φιλοτιμούμενος, ὧν ὁ φθάσας μέτρει τὴν γένεσιν καὶ ἅ τὴν χάριν ἀνθεῖν οὐκ ἐδίδου νεάζουσιν. Νῦν δὲ δι' ἐνὸς ἀνδρός, εὐσεβῶν καὶ καινῶν καὶ γενναίων ἔργων ἀθλητοῦ, καὶ νεαζούσας ὠδίσιν ἐγκαλλοπίζεται καὶ τὸ γῆρας αὐτοῖς ὀνειδέσιν ἀποδύεται ... Photius, *Homilia* XVIII:1ff.

⁹³⁰ Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 217ff.

⁹³¹ Photius, *Homilia* VII.

⁹³² Identified by Mango (*The Homilies of Photius* 297ff) as the 867 victory over the Western church.

it in eighth century Byzantium, where the term was unknown.⁹³³ What the two of them have in common is a concern for historical continuity, and as such, the Byzantine revival is far less problematic than its Italian counterpart: whereas the 15th-century Italians tried to suppress a period of almost a thousand years in their historical consciousness, the eight-century Byzantines had only to connect with a past that lay a few generations back. On the other hand, even this connection is problematic, because it tends to give the impression of a coherent “Byzantine” culture surviving under the surface of Iconoclast whitewash. In fact, just as the apse mosaic was not recovered from its foundations but laid into them from outside, the appreciation of its renascent beauty came from a man who was not at all uncontroversial. Mango has even suggested that the new mosaic, the first image in the yet barren church, was secretly commissioned by the patriarch in a *coup* directed at his traditionalist opponents.⁹³⁴

Photius was made patriarch after pressure from the imperial guardian Bardas in 858, passing all the stages of priestly ordinations in two days. He became famous for anathemising the pope and the whole Western church in 867, but was himself recalled from his post by the new emperor Basileios I and condemned in 869. Later on, he was reinstalled by the same emperor in 880 and finally deposed by his own pupil, Leo VI, in 886. Both of his terms he had to face a faction of opponents known as the as “extremists”, whose own candidate, Ignatius, was recalled from his post twice and reinstalled in between. Photius and Ignatius alike became declared saints later on, possibly to tone down further factional resent.⁹³⁵ But whereas Ignatius is merely known as a pious man, whose concern was with the unity of the church, Photius is remembered as the Byzantine humanist *par preference*, a man who struggled to affirm, not only the superiority of his own culture, but also its connections to the ancient past. Thanks to Photius, many ancient Greek writings have come down to our days, and he plays a role similar for Western humanism to that of the ‘Abbasid translators for the history of sciences. In fact, it might be more than just coincidental.

⁹³³ Mango, *The Homilies of Photius* 305.

⁹³⁴ Ibid., “The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photius” 140.

⁹³⁵ Karlin-Hayter, “Gregory of Syracuse, Ignatios and Photius” 145.

3.2.1. Books from Baghdad?

When we were chosen by the council and by imperial decree to set away for Assyria, you asked me, dear brother Tarasius, to make a compilation of the books which were read when you were not present ...⁹³⁶

A work of immense influence, not only for the Byzantine revival of the classics, but for our knowledge on the classics, is the *Bibliotheca* of Photius, which was written under unclear conditions, probably in connection with an embassy to the Arabs. Thanks to this summary of classical works – 279 to be exact – written for Photius’ younger brother Tarasios, whole works otherwise thought lost are at least preserved in short versions or quotations, and give us many glimpses into the lost works it surveys.

Some fifty years ago, Hemmerdinger’s theory that the whole *Bibliotheca* could have been compiled in Baghdad, based on classical works preserved there and not in the Byzantine capital – thus explaining its connection to the “Assyrian” embassy mentioned in the foreword – was widely rejected by scholars as Ahrweiler and Lemerle, at which Hemmerdinger himself responded: “J’en appelle au lecteur candide: quelle est *l’hypothèse invraisemblable*? Serait-ce celle qui consiste à supposer que les manuscrits analysés par Photius se trouvaient en 855 à Bagdad? Alors que c’est à Bagdad que Hunain ibn Ishaq (809-873) a traduit en syriaque puis en arabe une si grande partie de la littérature grecque?”⁹³⁷ Of course the theory is quite excentric, leaving many questions unanswered, but there are as many questions to be answered regarding the *Bibliotheca*. Why did Photius decide to write this compilation of Classical works as soon as he had been chosen to follow an embassy to “Assyrian” territory? If the books already were in Constantinople, why did Tarasios not read them there?⁹³⁸ Why is Photius talking about the books as if he had not seen them for a long time,⁹³⁹ and why does he express having had problems of finding a secretary?⁹⁴⁰

⁹³⁶ Επειδὴ τῷ τε κοινῷ τῆς πρεσβείας καὶ τῇ βασιλείῳ ψήφῳ πρεσβεύειν ἡμᾶς ἐπ’ Ἀσσυρίου αἰρεθέντας ἤτησας τὰς ὑποθέσεις ἐκείνων τῶν βιβλίων, οἷς μὴ παρέτυχες ἀναγινωσκομένοις, γραφήναι σοι, ἀδελφῶν φίλτατέ μοι, Ταράσιε ... Photius, *Bibliotheca*, Apographe 1-4.

⁹³⁷ Hemmerdinger, “Photius á Bagdad” 37.

⁹³⁸ Photius, *Bibliotheca* Apographe 1ff.

⁹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10ff.

⁹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5ff, though Treadgold does not subscribe to this reading.

If we begin with the embassy – the only event of which we might feel somewhat certain –⁹⁴¹ there are problems enough to tackle. Ahrweiler places it in 838⁹⁴² and Dvornik in 855⁹⁴³ whereas Mango prefers a date as late as 876,⁹⁴⁴ and Treadgold, favouring neither, argues that the embassy must have taken place after the death of emperor Theophilus in 842, but before Photius became patriarch in 858.⁹⁴⁵ During this period of some fifteen years, several Byzantine embassies to “Assyrian” territories can be traced from Arabic and even Slavonic documents.⁹⁴⁶ Most scholars, including Hemmerdinger, believes it took place in 855; Treadgold opts for 845.⁹⁴⁷ All these suggestions rely upon the different interpretations of Photius’ life that have been made since Hergenröther.⁹⁴⁸ Ahrweiler’s conclusions are based on the presumption that Photius was an extremely learned young man with great qualities both for writing a work like the *Bibliotheca* and embarking upon an embassy in 838, Mango’s on the dry calculations of the availability of books in Constantinople for a person who was at that time not yet a patriarch, Dvornik’s on the actual contents of the foreword, and Treadgold’s on the political and interfamiliar court complications around 843, which is also touched upon by Mango.⁹⁴⁹ Neither author, of course, accept the Baghdad theory, and Lemerle points to the fact that Photius is talking about the goal of his expedition as a different place than the one where he is dictating to his secretary.⁹⁵⁰ But then it is important to note that the Abbasid capital in this time was situated, not in Baghdad, but in Samarra, some 125 km to the north.⁹⁵¹ Photius could have made a stopover long enough to compile the *Bibliotheca* in Baghdad.⁹⁵²

⁹⁴¹ That is, as long as we regard the preface and postface of the *Bibliotheca* as authentic, which most scholars do.

⁹⁴² Ahrweiler, “Sur la Carrière de Photius avant son Patriarcat” 361. This dating is accepted by Lemerle (*Le premier humanisme Byzantin* 180).

⁹⁴³ Dvornik, “The Embassies of Constantine-Cyril and Photius to the Arabs” 575.

⁹⁴⁴ Mango, “Books in the Byzantine Empire, A. D. 750-850” 40.

⁹⁴⁵ Treadgold, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photius* 26.

⁹⁴⁶ Dvornik, *Les Légendes de Constantin et de Méthode vues de Byzance*, ch. III 85-111.

⁹⁴⁷ Treadgold, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photius* 34.

⁹⁴⁸ Hergenröther, *Photios, Patriarch von Konstantinopel* 315f.

⁹⁴⁹ Mango, “The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photius” 135. Of course, Mango’s whole reconstruction of Photius’ early life is, as he admits himself, radically different to that of Ahrweiler (“Sur la Carrière de Photius avant son Patriarcat”)

⁹⁵⁰ Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme Byzantin* 42.

⁹⁵¹ Whether the Samarra connection would explain the rather unusual reference to “Assyria” is beyond my knowledge, but at least it is at odds with the common identification of Baghdad with Babylon.

⁹⁵² Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law* 368ff.

But to start with, what experience had Photius, whether young or old, that made him an appropriate envoy to the Arabs? The Slavonic hagiography of St Constantine-Cyril tells a story about how the later missionary to the Slavs, having “studied Homer and geometry with Leo, and dialectics and all philosophical studies with Photius; and in addition to that, rhetoric and arithmetic, astronomy and music, and all the other Hellenistic arts”⁹⁵³ was chosen by Michael III to follow an embassy to the Arabs, after “the Hagarites, who were called Saracens, blasphemed the single Deity of the Holy Trinity, saying: ‘... If you can explain clearly, send us men who can speak of this and convince us.’”⁹⁵⁴ Constantine, consequently referred to as the “Philosopher”, went to “the Hagarenes, a wise people, well versed in scholarship, geometry, astronomy and other sciences” and outwitted them with his great learning.⁹⁵⁵ This expedition was identified by Dvornik as that of Photius and dated to 855.⁹⁵⁶ But there are no clues to whether Photius – who was hardly that much older, as the legend seems to imply – had similar qualities which made him fit to follow an expedition with the purpose to debate Christianity and Islam. In 845 he was a newly appointed *protospatharios*,⁹⁵⁷ only vaguely reminiscent of John the Grammarian, whose visit to Baghdad had been such a showpiece of the emperor Theophilus.⁹⁵⁸

On the young Photius, we are confronted with two totally different pictures: one proposed by his “extremist” opponents, for whom Pseudo-Symeon, an angry proponent of the rivalling patriarch Ignatios, remains our principal source,⁹⁵⁹ and the other one by himself. According to Pseudo-Symeon, Photius’ father was of “Pagan” extraction,⁹⁶⁰ and the patriarch himself is referred to with the invective “Chazar-faced” or “Marzouqa”.⁹⁶¹ We also learn that Photius, as a young man, “met a Jewish magician who said to him, ‘what do you offer me,

⁹⁵³ *Vita Constantini* 31.

⁹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁵⁶ Dvornik, “The Embassies of Constantine-Cyril and Photius”, Lemerle, *Le Premier Humanisme Byzantin* 180. On the earlier status of envoys, see Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus* 364.

⁹⁵⁷ *Vita s. Ignatii* 509A.

⁹⁵⁸ Rosser, “John the Grammarian’s Embassy to Baghdad and the Recall of Manuel” 168-171.

⁹⁵⁹ *ODB* v. Symeon Magistros.

⁹⁶⁰ ἔθνικοῦ αἵματος ὄν, Symeon Magistros 668:18.

⁹⁶¹ Χαζαροπρόσωπος, *Ibid.*, 673:19, μαρζούκα, 673:21. Gouillard (“Le Photius du Pseudo-Syméon Magistros” 398f) struggled to find a Laz connection to the last name. It is quite startling that nobody seems to have noticed the simple fact that *Marzūq* is a common Arabic name, meaning “being blessed by God”.

youth, if I put all Greek scriptures in your mouth and all wisdom you wish?’ And (Photius) answered: ‘I will give the half of my father’s belongings to you, if he allows it.’ But he answered, ‘I do not ask for money ... but come with me to this certain place, and deny the name in which Jesus was proselytizing’.⁹⁶² Jokisch seems to be the only scholar who concludes that Photius simply might have been educated by non-Byzantines.⁹⁶³

Photius himself never comments on his own education, and not even the admiring Hergenröther believes he could have been totally autodidact.⁹⁶⁴ But one clue he gives to his early years is the iterated mentioning of the persecution which his parents had to undergo due to being Iconophiles.⁹⁶⁵ Strangely enough, Mango and Dvornik, who both identified his father with the iconodule Sergios Confessor of whom it is said that he died being exiled *with his wife and children*,⁹⁶⁶ fail to answer the subsequent question about Photius own whereabouts.⁹⁶⁷ But if Mango’s interpretation rather than Ahrweiler’s and Dvornik’s is correct, that could only mean that Photius grew up and was educated elsewhere than in Constantinople before 843.⁹⁶⁸ Treadgold admits this, and concludes that Photius – later in life complaining to emperor Basil I that no exile has ever been so cruel as to bereave a learned man of books –⁹⁶⁹, his father, and the rest of the family travelled around with loadens of books through which the children got their education.⁹⁷⁰ Except for the difficulty in imagining such an extraordinary complicated exile, this explanation (“these were presumably most of the 400-odd books mentioned in his *Bibliotheca*”) is totally at odds with Mango’s (“no Byzantine gentleman is known to have possessed as many as 279 books”).⁹⁷¹

⁹⁶² διὸ καὶ Ἑβραίων τινὶ μάγῳ συντετυχώς, ἅτι μοιᾶ ἔφη ἄδῶς, νεανία, καὶ ποιήσω σε πάσαν γραφὴν Ἑλληνικὴν ἐπὶ στόματος ἄγειν καὶ πάντας τοὺς ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ παρευδοκιμεινᾶ ὁ δέ φησι ἅτὸ ἡμισυ τῆς οὐσίας αὐτοῦ προθύμως ὁ ἐμὸς πατήρ παρέξει σοι. ἃ ὁ δέ ἄου χρήζω χρήματα ... ἀλλ’ ἐλθέ μετέ ἐμοῦ εἰς τόνδε τὸν τόπον καὶ ἄρνησαι τὸν τύπον ἐν ᾧ Ἰησοῦν προσηλώσαμεν. Symeon Magistros 670.

⁹⁶³ Jokisch, *op. cit.*, 365.

⁹⁶⁴ Hergenröther, *op. cit.*, 322.

⁹⁶⁵ Photius to his brother (*Epistulae* No. 234, II:150ff) Cf. letter the church in Antioch, *PG* 102:1018ff.

⁹⁶⁶ στερηθεὶς πλοῦτου πλείστου πανοικὶ σὺνάμα τῇ γυναικὶ Εἰρήνῃ καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ὑπερορίζεται, *Synaxarium CPL* 682.

⁹⁶⁷ Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*, 387, Mango, “The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photius” 136.

⁹⁶⁸ Especially if we suggest that he was anathemized in 837 – although the alleged iconoclast council of that year has been doubted. *Ibid.*, 137, and Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 209.

⁹⁶⁹ Photius, *Epistulae* No. 98, p I:133f.

⁹⁷⁰ Treadgold, “Photius Before his Patriarchate” 7.

⁹⁷¹ Mango, “Books in the Byzantine Empire” 39. It has not to do with the physical volume, but with the costs.

Where, then, did Sergios Confessor spend his exile, hence, where were the children educated and where did they find access to all these books? In his old days, Photius was disposed of in different monasteries, but that was not an option for his father, who had to go abroad with his family. Among other iconodules, Stephen the younger found a recluse from Constantine V in more remote parts of the empire, most notably Cyprus,⁹⁷² whereas Epiphanius of Kallistratos claims to have spent his exile under Leo V roaming around the Black Sea region.⁹⁷³ Pseudo-Symeon, again, after delivering the story about the Jewish magician, points in the direction of the alliance between Photius and Gregorios Asbestas of Syracuse as deciding for the young man's career, but it seems the friendship was formed rather by the time Gregorios was deposed from his role as bishop of Syracuse.⁹⁷⁴ By then, Ignatius was patriarch in Constantinople for the first time and Photius already active at the imperial court.⁹⁷⁵

Recently, Jokisch suggested that Photius not only wrote his *Bibliotheca*, but even lived as a refugee in Baghdad before 843.⁹⁷⁶ His main argument is a passus from the *Fihrist* where the anti-Mu'tazili doctrines of Ibn Kullab are debated. A certain al-Baghawi is said to have learned about their "Christian" origins:

We visited Fuṭyūn, the Christian, in the Roman quarter, on the western side [of Baghdad]. While we were discussing, I asked him about Ibn Kullāb. He said "God have mercy upon °Abd Allāh [Ibn Kullāb]! He used to come to me and sit in that cloister; he pointed in the direction of the church and from me he took this statement: [The Word of God is God]⁹⁷⁷. Oh, if he were alive! We would have convinced the Muslims." [...] Muḥammad bin Ishāq aṭ-Ṭālqānī asked him: "What do you say about Christ?" Fuṭyūn said: "What the Sunni Muslims say about the Qur'an".⁹⁷⁸

⁹⁷² Auzépy, *L'Hagiographie et L'Iconoclasme Byzantin* 271-84.

⁹⁷³ Brubaker, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* 206.

⁹⁷⁴ Symeon Magistros 671.

⁹⁷⁵ Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*, 22.

⁹⁷⁶ Jokisch, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁷⁷ Mentioned in the previous passage. Should be understood as the "Speech or Sayings of God are God himself", a central dogma to the Traditionalist Muslim as well as to the Christian.

⁹⁷⁸ daḥalnā °ala Fuṭyūn n-naṣrānīyi wa-kāna fī dāri r-Rūmi bi-l-ḡānibi l-ḡarbiyi fa-ḡara°a l-ḥadīṭ °ilā °an sa°altuhū °an Ibni Kullābin fa-qāla raḥmatullāhi °Abdu Allāhi kāna yaḡī°unī fa-yaḡlisu °ilā tilka az-zāwiyyati wa-

This might seem more than far-fetched, but there are actually two things to note about this story which make Jokisch's thesis interesting, although he himself does not examine them in that way. It seems that the quotation, as far as it can have been correctly quoted from the event, describes an episode which took place shortly after the death of Ibn Kullab ("I asked him about Ibn Kullāb – He said "God have mercy upon °Abd Allāh") in 855.⁹⁷⁹ This year has, in fact, been suggested as one of the probable dates for Photius' embassy to the Arabs, and precisely that embassy which, according to the legend of St. Constantine, was caused by an invitation from the caliph al-Mutawakkil, to let prominent Romans discuss Christianity and Islam in presence of the Caliph in Samarra.⁹⁸⁰ Concerning the Futūn who al-Baghawi visited, we should note 1) that he has knowledge how to debate Islam and Christianity ("We would have convinced the Muslims") 2) it is nowhere stated that he *lived permanently* in Baghdad when al-Baghawi visited him, only that he *was* (kāna), perhaps for the time being, staying in the Roman quarter there. But – and that is the crucial point – *he had known* Ibn Kullab, that is, when the latter was still alive, before 855.

To get this puzzle together, we must imagine that al-Baghawi visited a certain, in Baghdad, well-known Roman intellectual, who had briefly returned there from his native country to find that an old friend of his had died, a friend which he had known when he lived in Baghdad himself, and maybe hoped to use in his religious polemics. We are talking about a period when winds of change blew over the Islamic world: the *Mihna* was over since about seven years, Hanbalism was accepted, official Sunni Islam protected, Shi'ism suppressed, Judaism and Christianity treated harshly. Almost simultaneously Orthodoxy had been established in the Christian as well as in the Muslim world.⁹⁸¹ It is indeed tempting to put this mysterious Futūn of the year 855 in connection with one of the most important figures in the history of the Orthodox church, who might have visited Samarra the same year in order to debate Christianity and Islam. But it requires that Photius, if it was him, *had*, some time

°ašāra °ilā nāhīyati min l-bāi°ati wa-°innī °aḥāda hādā al-qawla, wa-lu °āšī la-naššarnā l-Muslimīna <qāla al-Baḡāwīyu> wa-sa°alahū Muḥammad bnu Ishāqa aṭ-Ṭāliqānīyu fa-qāla: mā taqūlu fī l-Masīhi fa-qāla mā yaqūluhā °ahl us-sunni l-Muslimūna fī-al-Qur°ān. Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist* 180. "What the Sunni Muslims say about the Qur'an": that is, that it (Christ or the Qur'an) is the Word of God, Uncreated before time.

⁹⁷⁹ van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 180.

⁹⁸⁰ Dvornik, "The Embassies of Constantine-Cyril and Photius"; but Vavrinek, ("A Byzantine Polemic against Islam in Old Slavonic Hagiography" 538ff.) dates it to 851/2, based upon Constantine's age (24).

⁹⁸¹ Haddad, "Iconoclasts and Mu'tazila" 287-305.

before 855 – and if we are not to believe that he was embarking on the 845 embassy as well, it leaves the unknown years in exile as the only solution – been sitting together with Ibn Kullab in the Roman quarters of Baghdad, discussing the identity of the Word of God.⁹⁸² It should be noted that Ibn al-Nadim mentions a man of the same name (Ftyūn)⁹⁸³ in a list of different men who helped translating foreign works into Arabic under the Abbasids.⁹⁸⁴ Such translators were mostly picked from learned Greeks and Syrians living in Abbasid realms.⁹⁸⁵

One might reject these uncertain assumptions about a youth in exile and claim that the *Synaxarium* is wrong, that Photius stayed in Constantinople with his siblings whereas only the parents went into exile.⁹⁸⁶ Such attempts⁹⁸⁷ to keep Photius there have instead tried to connect his great knowledge with the mysterious Leo the Philosopher – referred to in the vita of St. Constantine above – or Leo the Mathematician, a cousin of John the Grammarian who seems to have been active in Constantinople in the 830s, although Lemerle himself admits that evidence for such a connection remains obscure and untrustworthy.⁹⁸⁸ The main argument lies in Leo’s “Hellene” reputation as a man with great love for and knowledge of the classics.⁹⁸⁹ It must actually be said here, though, that the most notable thing about this Leo, later archbishop of Thessaloniki and the alleged inventor of an optical telegraph which could bring messages from the Arab frontier to Constantinople within an hour,⁹⁹⁰ is 1) his Arab

⁹⁸² Cf. van Ess, “Ibn Kullāb und die Miḥna” for a full discussion on the topic.

⁹⁸³ Flügel and van Ess reads this as “Pethion” (!) and tries to find a Nestorian connection; Dodge adopts the same reading in his translation, but prefers “Photius” in his list of translators (though the original name is the same).

⁹⁸⁴ Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist* 244. But the MS 1234 from the Sülemaniye kütüphanesi in Istanbul, which *possibly* might be the only MS dating from the author’s own time, and *probably* copied directly from the original, seems to have a different reading; cf. note in the introduction to the Dodge edition.

⁹⁸⁵ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 136.

⁹⁸⁶ Dvornik suggests this in “The Patriarch Photius in the Light of Recent Research” 6, where he quotes a letter from Photius to Tarasios, concerning the pains of separation, as a hint at what the children might have had to undergo, allegedly separated from their parents.

⁹⁸⁷ Dvornik, “The Patriarch Photius in the Light of Recent Research” 4, Hergenröther, *Photios, Patriarch von Konstantinopel*, 323, Stratoudaki White, *Patriarch Photios of Constantinople* 26, Treadgold, “Photius Before his Patriarchate” 13.

⁹⁸⁸ Lemerle, *Le Premier Humanisme Byzantin* 182. The accuracy of the alleged letter of Photius to “Leo the philosopher” on the redundancy of the verb “to be” (τί σημαίνει ἡ τοῦ εἰμὶ παρολκή, *Epistolae*, No. 208, pII107f.) is doubted by this author (*op. cit.*, 168n).

⁹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 173-176. Dvornik, “Photius Career in Teaching and Diplomacy” 211-214.

⁹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

connections: the most thorough report we have about him is the one by Theophanes Continuatus describing how he was “discovered” by emperor Theophilus after the caliph al-Ma’mun, having heard rumours about him from a Byzantine prisoner of war, invited him to lecture in Baghdad,⁹⁹¹ and 2) his relative insignificance for the history of sciences: no mathematical achievements of his are known, and Gutas rejects Theophanes’ account as totally incredible and inadequate, as the caliph al-Ma’mun at this time was surrounded by brilliant mathematics like al-Khwarizmi (the man who introduced the Indian numerals we are using to this day) – rather, Gutas argues, does the account mirror the general inferiority complex of many Byzantines towards Baghdad.⁹⁹² Leo seems to have been disappointed with the low level of learning in Constantinople,⁹⁹³ something which makes one wonder if Photius might have got his vast learning in the Byzantine capital even if he had stayed there.⁹⁹⁴

We return to Pseudo-Symeon. It is stated in the anecdote about the Jewish magician that Photius became accustomed to books in “magic and astrology”, something which of course is clearly said in order to dismiss Photius as an evil and wicked man.⁹⁹⁵ But “magic and astrology” to an author like Pseudo-Symeon, writing in the tenth or 11th century, is likely to have included all kinds of arts, like alchemy and astrology, which, although not being sciences in the modern sense, at least were forerunners of the modern sciences like chemistry and astronomy.⁹⁹⁶ There is no idea trying to describe the entire history of such activities in Byzantium here – it suffices to say that Leo, if the reports about him are true, was the first Byzantine in almost two centuries to write a treatise about astrology, this subject mostly being frowned upon since the breakdown of Classical culture.⁹⁹⁷ Only in one area do

⁹⁹¹ Theophanes Continuatus, *Hist.* 185-190. Jokisch (*op. cit.* 347ff) tries to make a similar connection here, as between Photius and Futūn, between Leo the mathematician and the obscure Ġabīr or Geber.

⁹⁹² Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 180.

⁹⁹³ Theophanes Continuatus *Hist.* 192.

⁹⁹⁴ Stratoudaki White, *Patriarch Photios of Constantinople* 16-17 and 39n. I do not really see how the author can defend her position in the text while admitting in the footnote that it is opposed by facts. See further in Lemerle, *Humanisme*, and art. by Moffatt, “Schooling in the Iconoclast Centuries” 85-92. Dvornik himself concludes that Leo must have been self-taught. “Photius Career in Teaching and Diplomacy” 212.

⁹⁹⁵ βίβλοις τῆς μαντικῆς καὶ ἀστρολογικῆς τερατείας, Symeon Magistros 670:19-20. In fact, the description of the Jew pretty much matches that of the mysterious “Jewish sourcerer” accused of having brought Iconoclasm from the Arabs to court of Leo III; cf. Mansi XIII:197.

⁹⁹⁶ Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* 171.

⁹⁹⁷ Cf. *ODB* v. Astrology. Except, of course, for Stephen of Alexandria, who wrote in a totally Arabo-Perisan context and based his predictions on the Islamic calendar.

we know that these forerunners of the natural sciences were openly practised on a wider scale, and that was in the Islamic world, where pre-Islamic Persian knowledge (associated with magic and astrology even in the Bible) was revived under the ‘Abbasids.⁹⁹⁸

One might have a look at the episode which, according to the anti-Photian propaganda, was the origin of the epithet “Marzuq”. Pseudo-Symeon claims that

One night, there was a great earthquake; and this Photius, having ascended the ambo, spoke to the people and claimed that the tremblements were not caused from a plentitude of sins, but from an abundance of water, and that every man has two souls, one which is sinful and one which is not.⁹⁹⁹

Here is Photius blamed for two heretical doctrines at one time: first, for claiming that earthquakes have natural causes, and secondly, for claiming that man has two souls. As for the latter doctrine, it was condemned at the council of 869 without any explicit reference to Photius,¹⁰⁰⁰ but it seems difficult to find other reasons for its mentioning there.¹⁰⁰¹ According to Treadgold, the whole story originated from some kind of practical joke which Photius played upon the unlearned patriarch Ignatius, in order to prove the latter’s intellectual inability to defend himself against foreign doctrines.¹⁰⁰² However, the great “Philosopher of the Arabs” in Baghdad, and close contemporary of Photius, al-Kindi, wrote several disputations under the unusual title “on the Souls”, going back to ancient distinctions.¹⁰⁰³

⁹⁹⁸ “Magic” somewhat more in our modern sense, either as a means for personal gain or in public of course existed in the Islamic world as well: the *Fihrist* devotes an entire chapter to it.

⁹⁹⁹ Ἐν μιᾷ νυκτὶ συνέβη γενέσθαι σεισμοὶ μεγάλοι· καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Φώτιος ἀναβάς ἐπὶ τοῦ ἄμβωνος δημηγορήσαι εἶπεν ὅτι οἱ σεισμοὶ οὐκ ἐκ πλήθους ἁμαρτιῶν ἀλλ’ ἐκ πλησμονῆς ὕδατος γίνονται, καὶ ἕκαστος ἄνθρωπος δύο ψυχὰς ἔχει, καὶ ἡ μὲν μία ἁμαρτάνει, ἡ δὲ ἕτερα οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει, Symeon Magistros 673.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Mansi 16:404.

¹⁰⁰¹ Gouillard, “Le Photius du Pseudo-Syméon Magistros” 402.

¹⁰⁰² Treadgold, “Photius Before his Patriarchate” 15. Prof. Lock kindly brought my attention to a modern interpretation of this 869 controversy in Owen Barfield’s “Unancestral Voice” (1965), where the accusation of “two souls” is connected to early Western refusals to admit everyman’s participation in the Spirit.

¹⁰⁰³ “an-nafsiyāt”, according to Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist* 259. al-Kindi distinguished between different levels of consciousness (gr. *nous*) in the universe (cf. *El* v. al-Kindi).

At least one work on earthquakes is known from the pen of al-Kindi, “On Winds in the Depths of Earth which Cause a Plentitude of Earthquakes”¹⁰⁰⁴, a title which goes back to Aristotle,¹⁰⁰⁵ who, in turn, tried to refute the ancient natural philosophers who had explained earthquakes from an excess of rain water.¹⁰⁰⁶ Whatever the audience of Photius might have understood of this, his opponents clearly did not poke fun at him because they had a more scientific explanation, but because they preferred to explain earthquakes as a Divine punishment for human sins. The Late Antiquity debates between the Aristotelean Johannes Philoponos and the Bible-thumping Cosmas Indicopleustes in Alexandria spring to mind.¹⁰⁰⁷ Now, Philoponos¹⁰⁰⁸ was no philosophical outcast in a world of fanatical Christians, but the representative of a cosmopolite society, and there is another aspect in the story about Photius and the Jew which should not pass unnoticed: why is it, that a Jew is referring to Classical Greek knowledge, and why is it that his magic is able to “put all the Greek authors in the mouth” of Photius? Of course the pious author, adherent of Ignatius and the Orthodox “extremists”, has no sympathy for either Jews, Gentiles, or Persians.¹⁰⁰⁹ But that Photius is said to have been brought up in such a context, is worth to consider seriously if we revive the presumption that he grew up elsewhere than in Constantinople.

3.2.2. Class and Classics

For your Wisdom is well aware that that greatest among the archpriests of God, the renowned Photius, my Father in the Holy Spirit, was united to the Father of your Nobility in such a bond of affection that none even among those of your own

¹⁰⁰⁴ “ar-riyāḥu fi-bāṭini l-ʿarḍi l-muḥadaṭati kaṭīran al-zalāzal”, Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist* 261.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Meteorologica* 338a, 365a (Bekker).

¹⁰⁰⁶ Δημόκριτος δέ φησι πλήρη τὴν γῆν ὕδατος οὖσαν, καὶ πολὺ δεχομένην ἕτερον ὄμβριον ὕδωρ, ὑπὸ τούτου κινεῖσθαι· πλείονός τε γὰρ γιγνομένου διὰ τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι δέχεσθαι τὰς κοιλίας ἀποβιαζόμενον ποιεῖν τὸν σεισμόν, καὶ ξηραινομένην ἔλκουσαν εἰς τοὺς κενοὺς τόπους ἐκ τῶν πληρεστέρων τὸ μεταβάλλον ἐπιπτον κινεῖν. Ἀναξιμένης δέ φησιν βρεχομένην τὴν γῆν καὶ ξηραινομένην ῥήγνυσθαι, καὶ ὑπὸ τούτων τῶν ἀπορρηγνυμένων κολωνῶν ἐπιπτόντων σειεσθαι. Ibid., Bekker 365b.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Rosenqvist, *Bysantinsk Litteratur* 49ff.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Whom al-Kindi seems to have studied as well (cf. *El*² v. al-Kindi).

¹⁰⁰⁹ And, as Dvornik put it, “Hagiographers are seldom interested in emphasizing the secular education of their heroes.” (“Photius’ Career in Teaching and Diplomacy” 212).

religion and race had shown himself so much your friend: because, being a man of God, and mighty in the lore of God and man, he knew that, although the barrier of religion stood between us, yet a strong intelligence, wit and character, a love of humanity, and all other qualities which adorn and dignify a man's nature, arouse in the breasts of good men an affection for those in whom the loved qualities are found. And so he loved your Father, who was endowed with the qualities I speak of, even though the difference of religious faith stood between.¹⁰¹⁰

This work should not suggest, as Jokisch maybe does somewhat too confidently, that Photius grew up in the Roman quarters of Baghdad and discussed the nature of the Word of God with Ibn Kullab, neither should it, like Hemmerdinger, claim that the whole *Bibliotheca* was compiled in the spurious *Bayt al-Hikma*;¹⁰¹¹ but it seems difficult for the honest scholar to claim that the “Macedonian renaissance”, where Photius played a vital role, was independent of ‘Abbasid humanism. The *Bibliotheca* might be outstanding in Byzantine literary history;¹⁰¹² but its closest Arabic equivalent, the *Fihrist*, compiled some century later by a booktrader in Baghdad (while revealing tastes for magic, folktales and curiosities as well)¹⁰¹³ contains the summaries of quite as many classical Greek works as well as Arabic and Persian ones, except for that it demonstrates knowledge in law, sciences, philosophy, religion, literary stylistics, rhetoric and not least history of the classics.¹⁰¹⁴ As long as the Byzantine world remains unable to come up with any contemporary equivalent of the *Fihrist*, of the works of al-Kindi, Ishaq ibn Hunayn, of the history works of Tabari and Mas’udi, not to mention the universally

¹⁰¹⁰ Trans. From Jenkins/Westerink. Οὐ λανθάνει γὰρ τὴν ὑμετέραν σύνεσιν ὅτιπερ ὁ ἐν ἀρχιερεῦσι θεοῦ μέγιστος καὶ αἰόδιμος Φώτιος ὁ ἐμὸς ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ πατὴρ πρὸς τὸν πατέρα τῆς ὑμῶν εὐγενείας οὕτως συνῆπτο τῇ τοῦ πόθου σχέσει ὡς οὐδεὶς οὐδὲ τῶν ὁμοδόξων καὶ ὁμοφύλων φιλικῶς διετέθειο πρὸς ὑμᾶς· ἄνθρωπος γὰρ ὢν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πολλὰ τὰ θεῖα καὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα, ἤδει ὅτι κἂν τὸ τοῦ σεβάσματος δίστη διατείχισμα, ἀλλὰ τό γε τῆς φρονήσεως, τῆς ἀγγοίας, τοῦ τρόπου τὸ εὐσταθές, τὸ τῆς φιλανθρωπίας, τὰ λοιπὰ ὅσα κοσμεῖ καὶ σεμνύνει τὴν ἀνθρώπινην φύσιν προσόντα, πόθον ἀναφλέγει τοῖς τὰ καλὰ φιλοῦσι τῶν οἷς πρόσεστιτὰ φιλούμενα. Nicholas, *Letters* 14-15.

¹⁰¹¹ The existence of this place is doubtful and probably mostly legendary: cf. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 53-60.

¹⁰¹² Treadgold, “Photius Before his Patriarchate” 16.

¹⁰¹³ It is also the first work to mention the “Thousand and One Night” collection of stories.

¹⁰¹⁴ Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law* 175-85, lists the rare books from the *Bibliotheca* which are known from Arabic sources.

acclaimed poetry of the ‘Abbasid era, the general scholarly disapproval of Hemmerdinger’s proposal (“The Baghdad theory is too absurd to merit further discussion”)¹⁰¹⁵ should at least be turned into a cautious questioning of its critics.

It is important not to muddle this subject simply by talking about “Byzantine” or “Islamic” humanism. Cultural borders of the ninth century were not linguistic or religious; they had with social status and family connections to do, something which the case of Photius show us as well as any.¹⁰¹⁶ In the *Bibliotheca*, Photius mentions Byzantine acquaintances who were skilled in arithmetics,¹⁰¹⁷ but this leads to another question: how “pious” were Sergios the Confessor and his son, and how much was their exile caused by their being iconodules? There were plenty of men who suffered more under the Iconoclasts, most prominently the *graptoi*.¹⁰¹⁸ How much was Photius’ career propelled by his being a relative of the empress Theodora, how much was his disfavour at the court of Theophilos being a matter on a more personal level? Wherever the reasons, the most credible place where we are likely to find Photius’ exiled father, married as he was with a close relative of the empress Theodora, is probably not roaming around the Black Sea, like Epiphanos, or among pious brothers in the Marmara monasterys like St Stephen the younger, but – like the father of Digenis Akritas – among people of his own kind and rank.¹⁰¹⁹

Despite abstaining from marriage before his racer-career, Photius never chose the monastic way, something which seems to have given rise to the absurd rumour that he might have been an eunuch.¹⁰²⁰ At least it puts him at odds with everything we know about Byzantine intellectualism after Antiquity, and if his great knowledge was not aquired from a monastery, it must be connected to a different social factor. Certainly Photius, and Leo, were not the sole humanists in Byzantine history, and humanism obviously did flourish among the busy inhabitants of the monasteries. But as Mango said on the preceding generation of intellectuals – among them Photius’ great-uncle Tarasius, patriarch of Constantinople in the late eigjth century –¹⁰²¹ “they were men of substance, and some of them claimed kinship with

¹⁰¹⁵ Mango, “Books in the Byzantine Empire, A. D. 750-850” 38.

¹⁰¹⁶ Cf. Mango, “The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photius”.

¹⁰¹⁷ Photius, *Bibliotheca* 187, and Treadgold, “Photius Before his Patriarchate” 12-13.

¹⁰¹⁸ This was the nickname of the Iconodules whom Theophilus had punished by imprinting Iconoclast verses on their foreheads with hot irons (Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* 209).

¹⁰¹⁹ Cf. the introduction by Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritas* xxxix.

¹⁰²⁰ Hergenröther, *Photius, Patriarch von Konstantinopel* I:321.

¹⁰²¹ Cf. also Treadgold, “Photius before his Patriarchate” 13.

the imperial family. I would attribute the absence of such an intelligentsia in the immediately preceding period to the deliberate persecution of the aristocracy at the very beginning of the eight century, under Justinian II, and again under Leo III".¹⁰²²

The anti-Photian propaganda around Ignatios tried to claim that the patriarch had got all his knowledge from a Jew. Efforts to explain the flourishing of Classical culture in the Islamic world are sometimes expressed in similar style. Pro-Umayyad writers disdain the whole translation movement as a Byzantine conspiracy: the Byzantines, it is stated, knew that these Pagan books would cause the downfall of Christianity if they became public; therefore they locked them up in a building. However, the 'Abbasids, foolishly corrupted by non-Arab customs, required the books from the emperor and spread them throughout the Islamic world, thereby destroying the foundations of their own Prophetic religion.¹⁰²³ Such descriptions may give rise to the common prejudice that opposition towards the Classics was caused by religious fundamentalism and a fervent belief in Divine revelation as the sole source of knowledge.¹⁰²⁴ But that idea is based on the assumption that there already existed a fixed form of what constituted the religion (which is, then – possibly as a consequence of a scholarly idea about traditional religion produced by an aristocratic bourgeoisie – often confused with illiterate beliefs).¹⁰²⁵ As long as we do not, ourselves, claim Divine revelation (or *sophia*) to

¹⁰²² Mango, "Books in the Byzantine Empire" 45. The quotation is from Theophanes, AM 6218.

¹⁰²³ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 156f. Writers less hostile to the Abbasid cause takes another tone, but the popular explanation has kept its "magic" aspect; cf. the *Fihrist* 243: *I heard Abu Ishaq ibn Shahram tell in a general gathering that there is in the Byzantine country a temple of ancient construction. It has a portal larger than any other ever seen with both gates made of iron. In ancient times, when they worshipped heavenly bodies and idols, the Greeks exalted it, praying and sacrificing in it. [Ibn Shahram] said: "I asked the emperor of the Byzantines to open it for me [...] it had been locked since the time that the Byzantines had become Christians [...] He agreed to open it and, behold, this building was made of marble and great colored stones, upon which there were many beautiful inscriptions and sculptures. I have never seen or heard of anything equaling its vastness and beauty. In this temple were numerous camel loads of ancient books [...] Some of these were worn and some in normal condition. Others were eaten by insects."* (transl. Dodge 585).

¹⁰²⁴ Often repeated is the late legend that the Caliph 'Umar, at the Arab conquest of Egypt in 637, ordered the books of Alexandria to be burned as they were heretical if they contained anything which was contrary to the Qur'an, or otherwise superfluous (Cf. Lewis, "The Vanished Library".) The same library is said to have been destroyed by fanatical Christians in 391 as well, making it a recurring literary *topos* of secular enlightenment.

¹⁰²⁵ Best dealt with here by Gutas (The Myth of "Islamic" Opposition to the Greek Sciences, *Greek Thought Arabic Culture* 166). This is totally off topic, but even the modern scholar must remember that the "enlightened" approach is the product of an upper class which was in no ways immune against its own mystic beliefs in Man, Nature, Reason, and so on.

be the only source of religion, we must admit that social and material factors are a part of the society which makes up for the total sum of religious believers. Popular Christian or Muslim voices dismissed Classical knowledge a “foreign” or even “demonic” phenomenon indulged in by untrustworthy rulers and their elites. But what they appealed to was general feelings of mistrust and xenophobia, not the religious fervour of a complex and heterogeneous community. Just as the love for learning and Classical literature was independent of religious borders, the hate towards the *literate classes* (rather than towards the *literature* in itself) remained as independent of religious borders as it is today.¹⁰²⁶

There is in fact one very reliable source to the relationship between Photius and the ‘Abbasids: two letters written by his patriarchal successor Nicholas Mystikos to “the emir of Crete”, of which the second one – referring to a friendship between Photius and the father of the receiver – was quoted above. Canard was perfectly right in dismissing the presumption that the patriarch would address a “chef de pirates” – shortly after the fall of Thessaloniki – by equating him to the emperor.¹⁰²⁷ At least the first letter (which concerns the lordship over Cyprus, an island which was parted according to an agreement between the emperor in Constantinople and the caliph in Baghdad)¹⁰²⁸ must have been written to the Abbasid caliph, and when later copied in the 11th century, wrongly addressed to the “emir of Crete”, since that was the only Muslim potentate which the copyist could have thought of in his own days (the ‘Abbasid caliphate having by then since long lost both power and prestige).¹⁰²⁹ The second letter, which simply bears the headline, “to the same”, is obviously written to a Muslim ruler as well, which Jenkins, dating it to 904, the year of the fall of Thessaloniki, interprets as if it were really directed to the emir of Crete: “Eps. 1 and 2 cannot be addressed to the same person, as both represent the first contact between the correspondents.”¹⁰³⁰ But if it is incredible that an Arab *chef de pirates* would be likened to the emperor, it seems even more incredible that the Constantinopolitan patriarch should have been on friendly terms with the pirate’s father, whose very name is forgotten by history.¹⁰³¹ Admitted that Photius did have a

¹⁰²⁶ Again, *sophia* or *techne* are virtues of truth which require less reflection enabled by time for leisure.

¹⁰²⁷ Nicolas Mysticus, *Letters*, 1 line 16f.

¹⁰²⁸ The bishop of Chytros went to Baghdad when he wanted to plead his innocence over the insurgences of Damian in 911-2. Cf. Dikigoropoulos, “The Church of Cyprus during the Arab Wars” 264-5.

¹⁰²⁹ Cf. the introduction to 3.3. On mistakes of the copist, cf. Nicolas’ *Letters*, introduction by Jenkins xxxi.

¹⁰³⁰ Cf. Jenkins’ commentary to Nicolas, 256.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid. 526. Cf. Makrypoulias, “Byzantine Expeditions against the Emirate of Crete” 357, on far from amicable relations with the Cretan pirates.

Cretan connection through his relative Sergios Niketiates (whose exact relationship to the patriarch, however, has been debated),¹⁰³² there are more reasons to examine the suggestion, totally *en passant* hinted by Meyendorff,¹⁰³³ that the second letter is directed to the Abbasid caliph as well, and that he was a personal friend of this caliph's father.

Now who was this caliph? Assuming that the first letter was written during Nicholas' second patriarchate (as it concerns the Damian controversy of 913) and thereby addressed to the very young caliph al-Muqtadir (reigned 908-932), nothing contradicts the possibility that Nicholas wrote the second letter during his first patriarchate (901-907).¹⁰³⁴ His concerns for the situation of Byzantine prisoners in Arab territory then must have been addressed to either al-Muktafi (caliph 902-908) or his father al-Mu'tadid (caliph 892-902). Al-Mu'tadid, who moved the seat of the Caliphate back to Baghdad, was the son of a Greek woman, spoke contemporary Greek fluently, was a personal friend of Ishaq ibn-Hunayn, who translated so many Greek works to Arabic,¹⁰³⁵ and a pupil of Ahmad ibn al-Tayyib, who in turn was a pupil of al-Kindi.¹⁰³⁶ He was some fifty years younger than Photius, which means he was born when the latter was already patriarch for the first time, and he might have been no more than thirty or forty when the patriarch died. However, assuming that *he* was the receiver of Nicholas' letter – and not the father of the receiver – we should go yet another generation back, to al-Muwaffaq, a younger son of the caliph al-Mutawakkil. al-Mutawakkil was the caliph who established Sunni Orthodoxy in Islam, put political pressure on other religious groups, and – allegedly – invited Constantine-Cyril (and, according to Dvornik, Photius) to debate Christianity and Islam in Samarra; his son al-Muwaffaq never became caliph and seems to have kept away from the new capital, instead forming a small political opposition in Baghdad. It seems tempting to suggest a friendship between this Abbasid prince in Baghdad and the somewhat older Byzantine aristocrat from Constantinople.¹⁰³⁷

¹⁰³² Grégoire, "Études sur le neuvième siècle" 517ff, Mango, "The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photius" 135.

¹⁰³³ Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views on Islam" 128.

¹⁰³⁴ Jenkins' commentary to Nicolas, *Letters* 527.

¹⁰³⁵ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 125.

¹⁰³⁶ Cf. Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist* 261.

¹⁰³⁷ And *if* the "Bibliotheca" was compiled in Baghdad, Photius of course must have had influential contacts which gave him access to the libraries and perhaps also provided him with a Greek secretary. – The argument, why his polemicists and enemies did not point out this more clearly to us, might be countered from several viewpoints: either they were, unlearned or Byzantinocentric in their outlook, not aware of the Golden era in

3.2.3. Distinctions

As for the temple of Solomon, and the old Holiest of Holy, where the Arabs hold their godlessness and have made themselves the place of a mosque, nobody of the Christians in Jerusalem have any knowledge thereof, since the sacred place of the Arabs is forbidden to enter for the Christians.¹⁰³⁸

The way in which Photius encounters Muslims in his writings – if he mentions them at all – conforms with an attitude showed by most Byzantine authors, often going back to his days.¹⁰³⁹ His words on the status of the Temple mount, above, are what one might expect from an Orthodox patriarch discussing the religious situation in Jerusalem, but the description is made totally *en passant* and the ensuing letter concerns Biblical history. In his encyclica to the Oriental patriarchs, the contemporary situation is glimpsed as he says that “because of the different Arab barbarians and tribes who control the land, it will not be easy for you to accomplish these things ...”¹⁰⁴⁰ Again no mention of Muslims in a religious sense: a world plagued by “Arab barbarians and tribes” could describe the Near East before as well as after Islam.¹⁰⁴¹ In his letter to Boris of Bulgaria, Photius exhausts himself (and probably the recipient, too)¹⁰⁴² over a long discourse on the different heresies which have affected the church throughout the ages, without mentioning Islam.¹⁰⁴³

Baghdad or, indeed, how golden it in fact was; or aware of it but would not admit it, since it would be the same as acknowledging the superiority of the “Saracen” culture – or, they could not attack Photius on this point, since the very reason he had been in exile was that his family had been persecuted for being iconodoules. Throughout his life, Photius himself never missed an opportunity to elaborate on the sufferings of his family – perhaps deliberately keeping silent on where they had spent their exile – and his opponents might have found that the whole subject, in any case, was too much in his favour to find any reason to bring it up.

¹⁰³⁸ Ἡ μὲν τοῦ Σολομῶντος στοά, ὡσπερ καὶ αὐτὰ τὰ παλαιὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων, ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἀθεότητος κατεχόμενα καὶ μασιγίδιου χώραν αὐτοῖς πληροῦντα, οὐδενὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις Χριστιανῶν καθέστηκε γνωστά· ἄββατα γὰρ Χριστιανοῖς τὰ τοῖς Σαρακηνοῖς συντηροῦνται σεμνά. Photius *Amphilochia* 316, pVI:122.

¹⁰³⁹ Trapp, “Gab es eine Byzantinische Koranübersetzung?” 17.

¹⁰⁴⁰ τοῦ βαρβαρικοῦ καὶ ἀλλοφύλου τῶν Ἀράβων κατασχόντος τὰς χώρας ἔθνους, οὐκ ἐγένετο ῥῆστοντὰ πρακτικὰ πρὸς ὑμᾶς διακομισθῆναι. Photius, *Epistulae*, No. 2 (1.369-371) pI:52f.

¹⁰⁴¹ “Arab barbarians and tribes” caused great problems for Muslim pilgrims on the road to Mekka and Medina as well, and the Abbasid caliphs – as indeed did later Fatimids, Mamelukes and Ottomans – had to undertake regular expeditions against the nomads.

¹⁰⁴² Hergenröther, *Photius* 604.

Required by the archbishop of Calabria, Photius also responded to problems raised by the increasing Arab presence in Italy – piratic raids just like those which Byzantium had to endure from Crete. Should the baptism of a barbarian through a layman be regarded as valid? How should priests and deacons act whose wives have had intercourse with a barbarian? Might boys who have been raped by Arabs be allowed to the Holy communion? Should women be allowed to bring the Communion to Christians captive among Arabs? Should a priest baptise the children of Arabs if their mothers ask for it?¹⁰⁴⁴ Photius mostly reacts with carefulness and forgiveness; for example he says, it is always better that a Saracen child, even if it will be brought up in a non-Christian context, receives the baptism – one never knows how the Holy spirit will work.¹⁰⁴⁵ But again, he counters a problem of Arabs, not of Islam. The behaviour of certain Arabs in Italy (at least the raping of boys or the requests for baptism) would be difficult to regard as “Islamic” in a religious sense. Just like in the Borderlands, we encounter people with a non-institutional attitude to religion, a common characteristic of the nomad and the pirate.¹⁰⁴⁶

Are we supposed to believe that Photius could make a clear distinction between his learned friends in Baghdad and the Mediterranean pirates, as if he was totally ignoring their common Islamic faith? Perhaps the urge to pose such a question at all indicates how we tend to confuse the ideology of the Medieval sources with the realities they are struggling to integrate with their religious concepts of history.¹⁰⁴⁷ If Muslim observers tried to dismiss the cultural and technical sophistication of Byzantium by focusing upon the intellectual absurdity

¹⁰⁴³ The pope, on the other hand, in his letter to the Bulgarians advocates for the burning of “Pagan” books which have been taken from the Arabs: “De libris profanis, quos a Saracenis vos abstulisse, ac apud vos perhibetis, quid faciendum sit, inquiritis: qui nimirum non sunt reservandi; *Corrumpunt* enim, sicut scriptum est *mores bonos colloquia mala*; sed utpote noxii & blasphemi igni tradendi.” Nicolas, *Responsa ad Consulta Bulgarorum* (Mansi XV:432). Such suggestions – almost recalling Arab accusations about “Romans” burning their ancient heritage, though this was scarcely the issue here (cf. Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist* 266, describing how a “reliable source” told him that the Romans burned eleven books by Archimedes, adding ... *but that would take me long time to explain*) – are unheard of in Photius works.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Photius, *Epistulae*, No. 297, pIII:162f.

¹⁰⁴⁵ μάλλον οὖν ἀγαθὸν βαπτίζεσθαι τὰ βρέφη καὶ τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρραβῶνα τέως ὑποδέχεσθαι, ἴσως ὑπομησθέντα ποτὲ ὅτι Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσαντο ἐλέσθαι βουλευθῶσι τὴν χάριν διὰ τῆς χάριτος. *Ibid.*, I. 90-93.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Koukoule, *Byzantinon bion kai politismos* 54f. I particularly owe this reference to dr. Despina Ariantzi; cf. 2.1.1. for other sources. Photius is much more liberal in this concern than his 12th century colleagues (cf. Brand, “The Turkish Element in Byzantium”) but by that time, the rules of play were different.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Cf. Rotman, “Byzance face à l’Islam” and Halperin “Ideology of Silence” as discussed in 3.3.1.

of the Christian faith,¹⁰⁴⁸ Byzantine authors had few reasons to take Islam into consideration at all: from *their* point of historical observation, it could be dismissed as the faith of a Barbarian people, whereas the cultural achievements of the Arabs had to be countered from a different standpoint.¹⁰⁴⁹ In the Slavonic vita of St. Constantine, the great missionary, on visiting the Khazars, takes great care to refute Judaism; as for Islam, it is never treated as a serious contender, but it is simply stated that he threw it aside like “filth”.¹⁰⁵⁰ Obviously, he could not treat his learned hosts in Baghdad in that way, and instead the Vita has him emphasising the historical right of the Byzantine church to the world the Muslim Arabs laid claims to:

And again they questioned him, saying: “Christ paid tribute for Himself and others. Why do you not do as He did? And if you keep yourself from it, why do you not at least pay tribute for your brethren and friends to the great and powerful race of Ishmael? We ask little, only one piece of gold. And for as long as the entire earth endures, we shall keep peace among ourselves as no one else.”

The Philosopher answered: “When Christ paid tribute which Empire existed, the Ishmaelite or the Roman?”

They answered: “Obviously the Roman.”

Constantine said: “Therefore you ought not scorn us for we all pay tribute to the Romans.”

After this they asked him many other questions, testing him in all the arts that they themselves knew. He explained everything to them. And when he had convinced them, they again said to him: “How do you know all this?”

The Philosopher said: “A certain man drew water from the sea and, carrying it in a bag, boasted to strangers, saying: ‘See this water? No one has any except me!’ To him came a man who lived by the sea and said: ‘Are you not ashamed of

¹⁰⁴⁸ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 85.

¹⁰⁴⁹ In other words, if an extreme observation of Christian dogma had proven to be a socially exhausting policy of the Isaurian empire (cf. introduction to this chapter and Whitton, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* 159ff) the cultural struggle of ninth century Byzantium against the ‘Abbasid caliphate and the Carolingian West had to be fought with other weapons than purely religious ones.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Vita Constantini* 61. The argument goes that ... *if Mohammed is a prophet, how can we have faith in Daniel? For Daniel said: ‘Unto Christ all vision and prophecy shall cease’ How can he who appeared after Christ be a prophet? For if we call him a prophet, we reject Daniel.*” (transl. Kanter).

what you are saying, boasting merely about this stinking bag? We have a sea of it!’ You are acting the same way. All the arts have come from us.”¹⁰⁵¹

The Byzantine cultural self-awareness, as echoed here in a Slavonic vita of the 11th century, is in accordance with the ideas ascribed to the “Byzantine renaissance”: its cultural capital is seen as something which has all the time existed in Byzantium, something which the Arabs have merely stolen in order to promote the “Barbarian” faith which Leo III was once said to have refuted. What this point of observation does not disclose – except indirectly – is its own function to the inner-Byzantine cultural struggle; why a Slavonic vita on the great “Missionary to the Slavs” lays such emphasis upon an interlude among the “Saracens”.¹⁰⁵²

3.2.4. Remarks

Irfan Shahid once suggested that the traditional “trinity” of Byzantine cultural sources – Roman, Greek, Christian – could be extended with a fourth aspect: Iran.¹⁰⁵³ As much as the three former left their marks “horizontally” upon the Mediterranean *oikoumene*, did the “vertical” Indo-Iranian culture in the mountainous interiors to the east influence Byzantine concepts of social hierarchies and power manifestations.¹⁰⁵⁴ Poetical metaphors aside, the structural similarity between the two “universes” is arguably an issue to be considered *before*

¹⁰⁵¹ *Vita Constantini* 39. The story takes a more fairy-tale turn as the saint is confronted with the earthly wealth of the caliph: ... they showed him a cultivated garden in which some of the things appeared to have at once sprung from the earth. And when he explained to them how this came about, they further showed him all manners of wealth, and houses adorned with gold and silver and precious stones and pearls, saying: “Philosopher, behold the wondrous miracle! Mighty is the power and great the wealth of Amerumnin [sic] lord of the Saracens.” Then he said to them: “This is not wondrous. Glory and praise be to God who has created all these things and given them to man for his consolation. For these things are His and no other’s.” And when they heard this from him, they became angry and resorted to their usual evil ways. Intending to poison him, they mixed a deadly potion and gave him to drink it. But merciful God, who said to all who truly believe in Him, “and if you drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt you” preserved Constantine from harm from that fatal drink and returned him again to his native land in good health. (39-41).

¹⁰⁵² Vavrinek, “A Byzantine Polemic against Islam in Old Slavonic Hagiography” 541.

¹⁰⁵³ Shahid, “The Iranian Factor in Byzantium”.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Cf. Howard-Johnston, “The Two Great Powers” 196.

the discussion on cultural transmissions, since the latter was dependent upon the former.¹⁰⁵⁵ The “Macedonian renaissance” would put its marks upon what we have come to know as the Byzantine world, but just like its Islamic counterpart, it was part of a social play, not the self-referential cause for it.¹⁰⁵⁶

¹⁰⁵⁵ MacLean (ed.) “Re-Orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East” (2005), an anthology of scholarly essays on the Near Eastern sources for the Italian renaissance, can serve as a useful comparison here, carefully avoiding simplistic explanations to the “East-West” *topos*. As Robert Irwin emphasises in his witty essay on Petrarch, cultural exchanges contain as many aspects of unintentional misunderstandings and deliberate misinterpretations, which tell us no less about the cultural game itself (“Averroës misunderstood the Greek philosophers and was himself misunderstood by both the scholastics and the critics of scholasticism; the story of their interaction with the Arabs was misunderstood by Renan, who was in turn misread by Edward Said”, 121) The notion of a renaissance contains its own paradox: the idea about an “eternal recurrence” conforming with the past contradicts precisely the renewal celebrated by Photius. The fact is that we are all caught in a cycle of re-readings which we can merely try to step outside by focusing upon the *epoché* that enables their existence: what thus makes the Renaissance into a “renaissance” is not cultural, but social facts that *make* them “cultural”.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Cf. Bourdieu, *op. cit.* (n881) 62ff.

3.3. Missions

When the Byzantine emperor John Tzimiskes embarked on his 961 military campaign into Syria, extending the conquests his predecessor Nicephorus Phocas had made on expense of the dispersed Muslim states to the south, conquering Damascus and Caesarea, and – according to a bragging letter sent to the Armenian king – climbed mount Tabor not far from Jerusalem, the prophecied days of the “misfortunate one”, the Roman precursor of the Muslim Antichrist, must have seemed to have come true.¹⁰⁵⁷ According to Liutprand of Cremona, this was at least how the Byzantines tried to see it.¹⁰⁵⁸

In fact, the event appears to have caught very little attention in the Muslim world. The tenth century marks the final disintegration of the caliphate, after the Spanish ‘Umayyads and the African Fatimids had established their own counter-caliphates in Cordova and Cairo, and the latter, not Baghdad, now posed the closest centralised contender to Constantinople.¹⁰⁵⁹ More importantly, popular Islam had definitely outgrown political centralisation: the ‘ulama were in possession of a vast literary canon, law and tradition that would be further extended and elaborated for the centuries to come.¹⁰⁶⁰ If the caliph could do little to change the minds of the believers, the Byzantine emperor had even less to say in a region that for three centuries had been out of Constantinopolitan control. The physical destruction wrought by the Byzantine troops was considerable, but they could not extinguish the entire Muslim civil population in Syria, as less as the ‘Umayyads before them could have made off with the entire Graeco-roman *oikoumene* there.¹⁰⁶¹

From a Byzantine viewpoint, the Near Eastern campaigns of John Tzimiskes and Nicephorus Phocas still contain an interesting symbolism for they point in two historical directions: backwards to the *in hoc signo* victories of the Cross under Leo III, Heraclius and Constantine I, and forwards to the Crusades, further precipitated by the Fatimid destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem half a century later.¹⁰⁶² If John Tzimiskes spied

¹⁰⁵⁷ Cf. Tabari, *Tārīḫ* I:2396 quoted at the beginning of ch. 1.1.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Cf. Liutprand, *Relatio de Legatione* 39 quoted in ch. 1.3.2.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Halm, *Die Kalifen von Kairo* 99-108.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Crone, Hinds, *God's Caliph* 77ff.

¹⁰⁶¹ Bosworth, “The City of Tarsus and the Arab-Byzantine Frontiers” 278f. Cf. *TIB* 5:101.

¹⁰⁶² Canard, “La destruction de l’église de la résurrection” 42f. The Byzantine response to this strange fancy of the caliph Hakim was to destroy the mosque of Maslama erected under Leo III in Constantinople. Within a few

no serious hope for establishing his authority in the region he conquered, his visit to the mount Tabor at least posed a symbolical victory directed at other geographical areas united by a common Christian consciousness. There are two aspects to note on this final development, which “civilised” the Holy War by bringing it into the homes of the civil population.

3.3.1. Word Wars

The one hundred and eleventh verse goes like this: “Say: He is one God, a God hammered out; he has not begotten, nor is he begotten, and there is nothing of his likeness” If this does not mean the spherical form, it is clear that it refers to something massive and solid, as is the case with a single body.¹⁰⁶³

In the West, Photius became remembered as the “father of Schism”, the man who brought the latent conflict between Rome and Constantinople up to a dogmatic level, where it would eventually result in the final division between Orthodoxy and Catholicism in 1054.¹⁰⁶⁴ As usual, politics was the underlying issue: the *filioque* controversy, which can appear almost laughable to modern eyes,¹⁰⁶⁵ provided the Byzantine patriarch with a valid argument to oppose Western missionary activities in the immediate proximity of Constantinople, and the fact was presented in as strong words to the Bulgars.¹⁰⁶⁶

decades, both buildings had been rebuilt, and the entire episode could have remained a mere controversy between the two central powers in Cairo and Constantinople. But for thousands of Latin and Western pilgrims who visited the Holy Land in the meantime, the empty space of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre would have provided them with a new and hostile view of the faith which Arculf had once described in such neutral terms.

¹⁰⁶³ Τὸ ἑκατοστὸν ἑνδέκατον μυθάριον ἔχει οὕτως: "Εἰπέ, αὐτός ἐστι Θεὸς εἷς, Θεὸς ὀλοσφυρος: οὐκ ἐγέννησεν, οὐδὲ ἐγεννήθη· οὐδὲ ἐγένετο ὅμοιος αὐτῷ·" εἰ μὴ τὸ σχῆμα τῆς σφαίρας δηλοῖ τὸ ὀλοσφυρον, ἀλλὰ γε τὸ πυκνὸν καὶ πεπιλημένον, ὅπερ καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦ σώματος ἴδιον. Niketas Byzantios, *Refutatio Mohamedis* 776B.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Dvornik, *The Photian Schism* 279ff. This said, there have been many Western efforts – from cardinal Hergenröther in the 19th century to monsignore Dvornik himself in the 20th – to rehabilitate Photius (Dvornik on this topic in “The Patriarch Photius: Father of Schism – or Patron of Reunion?”)

¹⁰⁶⁵ And it is, of course, important to remember that it was Photius who brought it up to this level: for a summary of the entire controversy, see Haugh, *Photius and the Carolingians* XII.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *We have banished these people from the entire Christianity ... ἐπιμένοντας αὐτῶν τῇ πολυτρόπῳ πλάνῃ πάσης ἀγέλης Χριστιανῶν ἐκκηρύκτους ἐποιησάμεθα.* Photius, *Epistolae*, No.2 (1.219-230) Cf. foreg., 91ff; Kustas, “History and Theology in Photius” 62f.; Louth, *Greek East and Latin West* 184ff.

Around the same time, Nicetas Byzantius had written a refutation of the Qur'an, probably the most informative source we have to the Byzantine reception of the Islamic faith, which would define the Byzantine attitude to Islam for centuries to come.¹⁰⁶⁷ Much of its contents seems familiar from the letter of Leo III, but the work of Nicetas is more structured and reveals analytically sophisticated ambitions.¹⁰⁶⁸ It criticises the Qur'anic traditions not merely because they differ from those of the Bible, but also because of their apparent irrationality¹⁰⁶⁹ – the author begins by deploring the lack of systematic order in the Qur'an.¹⁰⁷⁰ On the other hand, Nicetas is just as keen as his predecessors to describe the “book of Moameth” as a demonic work,¹⁰⁷¹ suras describing invisible forces of nature are taken as an indicator that Muhammad believes in many gods, just like the Ancient Greeks did;¹⁰⁷² that the Muslim God, if there is a such, must be both good and evil;¹⁰⁷³ that Islam permits its believers to indulge freely in their own lusts and rages;¹⁰⁷⁴ that the Muslims are praying to a Pagan idol in Mekka.¹⁰⁷⁵ The theological core of Islam is attacked through an intentional or unintentional mistranslation,¹⁰⁷⁶ in which the Arabic epithet for God, *ṣamad* (undivisible), is taken a most concrete sense, either as “spherical” or as “hammered out”, as if referring to an idol.¹⁰⁷⁷ It is remarkable that such an argument would be brought up by an Iconodule Byzantine against Islam, and it presents us with a polemic that is seemingly less directed to the actual unbelievers than to his own fellow Byzantines.¹⁰⁷⁸

¹⁰⁶⁷ Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantines et l'Islam* 126.

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Like descriptions of the sun and the moon (Q 18:86, 54:1).

¹⁰⁷⁰ Nicetas Byzantius, *Refutatio Mohamedis* 704f.

¹⁰⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 705C, 764C, 797ff.

¹⁰⁷² *Ibid.* 777Cf. Nicetas even takes the opportunity to quote the Iliad to prove it (765A).

¹⁰⁷³ *Ibid.*, 780B.

¹⁰⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 829f.

¹⁰⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 720B.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Trapp (“Gab es eine byzantinsche Koranübersetzung?”; I am grateful to my colleague Johannes Grossmann for showing me this article) takes the examples of vulgar Greek as a proof that Nicetas used a translation made by someone else, perhaps outside Byzantium but available in Constantinople.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Nicetas Byzantius, *Refutatio Mohamedis* 708A ... ὡς αὐτὸς εἶπεν, ὀλοσφαιρός ἐστὶν ὁ Θεὸς. It precedes the comical miscomprehension that the “clotted blood” (sura 96) implies that humans are made out of “leeches” (ἐκ βδέλλης). Cf. Meyendorff, “Byzantine Views of Islam” 122.

¹⁰⁷⁸ The work is dedicated to the emperor (*ibid.*, 669A), but Nicetas also wrote letters to the “Hagarenes”. In these, he defends Christianity (Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantines et l'Islam* 127-133).

The last fact should serve as yet a reminder to treat ideological boundaries of the Middle Ages with great caution. On a strict theological level, the polemics of Nicetas bear the characteristics of an after-construction, a scholarly effort to interpret existing facts according to a universal religious model, which was not so universal anymore.¹⁰⁷⁹ The *actual* border between the Byzantine and Islamic worlds needs not be further elaborated here; Nicetas touches upon it all the time, as he describes how the Arabs are waging war upon their opponents with the purpose of “Arabising” them.¹⁰⁸⁰ Similarly, the denunciation formula for Muslims who became Orthodox Christians¹⁰⁸¹ repeats all Nicetas’ misconceptions of Islam, not necessarily because they expressed a Christian attitude in this concern, but because they represented a centralised Byzantine policy towards people from the unreliable borderlands.¹⁰⁸² In the *filioque* controversy, in the *holosphairos*-concept, the “victory of Orthodoxy” all stands out as the final transferral of universal religion from a conciliar to a literary level, a reflection of how the Roman world itself had finally turned into a literary *topos*.¹⁰⁸³ The extent of its “actuality”, the degree to which it might be said to have represented a historical reality or merely a rhetorical figure, can not be detected from itself; a research on this topic has to focus less upon the words of the sources than upon the world of their transmission.

3.3.2. Language Games¹⁰⁸⁴

When Constantine arrived in Moravia, Rastislav received him with great honor. And he gathered students and gave them over to Constantine for instruction. As soon as all the church offices were accepted, he taught them Matins and the Hours, Vespers and the Compline, and the Liturgy. And according to the word of

¹⁰⁷⁹ By this time, any Muslim of some education could have given him an reply as long as that which Leo III gave to the equally curious misconceptions on Christianity expressed by ‘Umar II.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Nicetas Byzantios, *Refutatio Mohamedis* 840A: ὁ δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς ἡμᾶς γινόμενος φόνος, οὐ δὲ ἄλλο τι γίνεται, ὡς αὐτοῖ φατε, εἰ μὴ διὰ τὸ Σαρακηνίζειν ὑμᾶς.

¹⁰⁸¹ Which either originates from Niketas himself (Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantines et l’Islam* 187) or from the translation of the Qur’an he was using (Trapp, “Gab es eine byzantinische Koranübersetzung?” 14f).

¹⁰⁸² Brand, “The Turkish element in Byzantium” 22.

¹⁰⁸³ Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* 161f.

¹⁰⁸⁴ On this term, cf. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Harvard UP 1982. Wittgenstein’s own remarks on religion can be found in *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (ed. von Wright 1977).

the prophet, the ears of the deaf were unstopped, the Words of the Scriptures were heard, and the tongues of the stammerers spoke clearly. And God rejoiced over this, while the Devil was shamed.¹⁰⁸⁵

St. Constantine (Cyril) and his brother Methodius are known as the inventors of the first Slavonic alphabet, created to enhance Byzantine mission in Moravia.¹⁰⁸⁶ It became yet another cause for controversy with the Catholic West, which found itself challenged by the spread of the Gospels and Christian rites in foreign languages.¹⁰⁸⁷

There are two aspects to note about the Byzantine missions to the Slavs. The first is the increasing role of written communications, which is already mirrored in the development of the Greek minuscule scripture for faster transmission of larger text masses, which took place in the early ninth century.¹⁰⁸⁸ Dmitri Gutas suggested that this development – as well as the general surge in Classical learning and education surveyed here – was a consequence of the rising demands on Greek texts in ‘Abbasid Baghdad.’¹⁰⁸⁹ It might be worth considering that Arabic is not only a cursive script in itself, but has stenographic qualities when written without vowels. More importantly, however, the ‘Abbasids introduced an invention from China which enhanced the spread of written messages over large distances: the paper.¹⁰⁹⁰ Whereas the role of the Text in the Islamic world¹⁰⁹¹ is sometimes explained from abhorrence to images, it is perhaps more interesting to suggest that it manifests the transition from imagocentric to textual communication due to new technical developments.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Vita Constantini* (transl. Kanter) 67-9.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 131.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Cf. *Vita Constantini* 71: *When he was in Venice, bishops, priests and monks gathered against him like ravens against a falcon. And they advanced the triligual heresy, saying: “Tell us, O man, how is it that you now teach, having created letters for the Slavs, which none else have found before, neither the Apostle, nor the pope of Rome, nor Gregory the Theologian, nor Jerome, nor Augustine? We know of only three languages worthy of praising God in the Scriptures, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.” And the Philosopher answered them: “Does not God’s rain fall upon all equally? And does not the sun shine also upon all? And do we not at all breathe air in the same way? Are you not ashamed to mention only three tongues, and to command all other nations and tribes to be blind and deaf?”*

¹⁰⁸⁸ Mullet, “Writing in Early Byzantium”, Trapp, “Gab es eine byzantinische Koranübersetzung?” 11.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 176ff.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* 26f.

¹⁰⁹¹ Neuwirth, “Blut und Tinte” 25-33.

The second point has only indirectly with the Islamic world to do, but might still say something important about our topic as a whole. In its most general sense, “history” is obsessed with manly spaces – the history of wars and kings – but tends to forget the invisible transmission of the epistemology which is a requirement for its survival *as* history. The monastic life, just like that of the *muğāhids*, was directed to the end of the life and the end of the world.¹⁰⁹² But the world did not end: it continued within a civil society which preserved its perceptions of holiness, and this is a fact which can perhaps only be satisfyingly explained from the assumption that both Christianity and Islam as historical entities were embraced by the women who formed the core of the families.¹⁰⁹³ It was these women, according to the Slavonic chronicler, who obstinately resisted Christianity when their husbands had already converted and sent their sons to be raised in the new Byzantine faith.¹⁰⁹⁴ But if a man is quick to change his faith depending on his overlord, the slower turns of history must be explained from a different factor.¹⁰⁹⁵ It might be interesting to end this survey with the suggestion that the final establishment of religious commonwealths in the Medieval world was a matter of female attitudes to tradition and holiness.¹⁰⁹⁶

3.3.3. Remarks

From a Byzantine point of view, Islam remained the faith of the “Ismaelites”, “Hagarenes” and “Saracens”, all names which had been used to denote pre-islamic Arabs.¹⁰⁹⁷ Rotman

¹⁰⁹² Pannewick, “Kreuz, Eros und Gewalt” 214f.

¹⁰⁹³ Cf. Neuwirth, “Blut und Tinte” ff. The female cult around the dead warrior-martyr is an especially striking feature of Iranian piety, where the “Holy Family” is also a key religious concept (cf. Momen, *Shi’i Islam* 235f).

¹⁰⁹⁴ Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 369.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Of course, this is basically what the initial religious controversy in *Digenis Akritas* is all about: the emir shows no remorse about becoming a Christian in order to get the girl he loves; but he is reproached by his mother (G 2:50, E 225ff). A psychoanalyst might have had much to say about that constellation.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism* (see *ibid.*) ended on a similar note; but their (to be quite honest) rude description of Muslim women seems to ignore the similarities to the female dimension in the emerging Christian church.

¹⁰⁹⁷ A brief survey of TLG occurrences show a surge in all three words after Islam, but no change of meaning to a group of religious adherents. “Ismaelites” figure largely in Judeo-Christian sources before Islam but also to denote an ethnic group in Late Antiquity (Stephanus Byzantius, the *Vita of Symeon the Stylite*, *Chronicon Paschale*) and is then used by Pseudo-Methodius, John of Damascus and in the *Vita of the 42 Martyrs of Amorion*. “Saracens”, the most common word for Arabs before as well as after Islam, became the common name

emphasised that it was still at this border where religious martyrdom abounded,¹⁰⁹⁸ whereas Charles Halperin suggested that an “ideology of silence” omitted any evidence of interreligious contacts.¹⁰⁹⁹ In fact, the whole problem becomes less conspiracist if we assume that it has not at all with ideology to do, but with epistemology. Equivalent to the inner concepts of holiness, the Trinitarian quarrels and the mistranslations of the Qur’an externally manifested a struggle which concerned not so much God as the world and the preferential right of seeing, interpreting and understanding it as a meaningful entity. Without referring to Islam, the pupil and successor of Photius, Nicholas Mystikos, could detect precisely that universalist will of the “Saracens” as he wrote his 914 letter to the caliph in Baghdad:

Two empires rule the whole world: that of the Arabs and that of the Romans, standing above everything and shining like the greatest two of the celestial bodies; it owes them, because of this, to keep together and foster brotherhood, rather than remain everlasting foreigners to each other due to differences in their way of living, in their habits, and in what they rever.¹¹⁰⁰

for Muslims in the Latin West; John of Damascus provided it with a false etymology derived from the story of Hagar. “Hagarenes”, the most interesting term due to its proximity to the Arabic word *Muhağirūn* (cf. the Crone-Cook hypothesis) figure in Biblical commentaries before Islam (apart from some seemingly post-Islamic identifications with Arabs in an introductory note to the work of the astrologist Theucer from Babylon and a bracketed word in the *Vita of Thekla* by Basilus from Seleucia). The verb μαγαρίζειν, which seems to be the only Greek equivalent to the Syriac word for converts to Islam, is extremely scattered in the mid-Byzantine corpus; Theophanes, the *Ecloga* of Leo III and the *Vita of the 42 Martyrs* are some of the sources which have been quoted here. Apart from that, Nikephorus Ouranos, describing the siege of a Near Eastern city in his *Tactica* (65:13/80) tells how “... οἱ Μαγαρίται ὅλοι καὶ οἱ Ἀρμένιοι καὶ οἱ Σύροι τοῦ αὐτοῦ κάστρου ὅσοι οὐ προσφύγωσιν ἂν εἰς ἡμᾶς πρὶν κρατηθῆ τὸ κάστρον, πάντες ἵνα ἀποκεφαλίσθωι” whereas Paul of Monemvasia (*Narrationes* 8:27) tells a moving story of a boy who was kidnapped by Arab pirates: “... ἄνθρωπος ἐχθρὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ με ἠγόρασε ... καὶ καθ’ ἐκάστην τιμωρεῖται με ἀναγκάζων τοῦ μαγαρίσαι με, ἀλλ’ ἐλπίζω εἰς τὸν Θεὸν καὶ εἰς τὰς ἀγίας σου εὐχὰς ὅτι τοῦτο οὐ μὴ ποιήσω ἐὰν ἔχω ἀποθανεῖν.” As Mrs. Katsiakiori-Rankl kindly told me, the modern Greek verb means “to become dirty”, obviously having gone through a change of meaning in the Ottoman era.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Rotman, “Byzance face à l’Islam” 787f.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Halperin, “The Ideology of Silence” 465f.

¹¹⁰⁰ “Ὅτι δύο κυριότητες πάσης τῆς ἐν γῆ κυριότητος ἢ τε τῶν Σαρκενηῶν καὶ ἢ τῶν Ῥωμαίων, ὑπερανέχουσι καὶ διαλάμπουσιν, ὡσπερ οἱ δύο μεγάλοι ἐν τῷ στερώματι φωστῆρες, καὶ δεῖ κατ’ αὐτό γε τοῦτο μόνον κοινωνικῶς ἔχειν καὶ ἀδελφικῶς, καὶ μὴ διότι τοῖς βίοις καὶ τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τῷ σεβάσματι κεχωρίσμεθα, παντάπασιν ἀλλοτρῶς διακεῖσθαι, Nicolas, *Ep.*1.

Conclusions

“Religions do not spring fully-fledged from the heads of prophets” was the since proverbial way in which Patricia Crone once questioned the origins of Islam.¹¹⁰¹ In fact, there is nothing which contradicts the suggestion that Islam originated just like that: suddenly, bursting and overwhelming, as it is described in the revelations of Muhammad.¹¹⁰² What does not develop overnight, however, is a common understanding for what such a phenomenon “means”: the *Geworfenheit* or perhaps rather the *Verfallen* that, according to the Abrahamic faiths, took place when Man was thrown out of the Garden of Eden, into the World.¹¹⁰³

It took a while for Muhammad to come to terms with his own revelations, many years for a Muslim community to emerge, and decades for the Arabs to submit. Arabic historiography lays great emphasis upon this process. But that is where its world ends: how Islam entered the still existing world of Roman universalism is never discussed.¹¹⁰⁴ This is neither very surprising, for it marks the point where it encounters a rivalling historical consciousness, that of the Byzantine and Medieval Christian world, which survived, revived, and never gave up its own claims to the world as it had been before Islam. Now, whereas one understands life backwards, one has to live it forwards,¹¹⁰⁵ and the starting-point of this work was that the initial encounter of the two universalisms cannot be described with a terminology that developed *after* it took place. Neither would it be phenomenologically possible to reconstruct such a terminology.¹¹⁰⁶ The present survey has only suggested that the intermittent

¹¹⁰¹ Crone, *Slaves on Horses* 12.

¹¹⁰² Lings, *Muhammad* 43ff.

¹¹⁰³ Cf. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* §38 (with an important distinction here: “Die Verfallenheit des Daseins darf ... nicht als ‘Fall’ aus einem reineren und höheren ‘Urstand’ aufgefaßt werden. Davon haben wir ontisch nicht nur keine Erfahrung, sondern auch ontologisch keine Möglichkeiten und Leitfäden der Interpretation”).

¹¹⁰⁴ “Whoever comes from the Mediterranean world of late antiquity to that of the Arab conquerors must be struck by the apparently total lack of continuity: the Syria to which Heraclius bade his moving farewell seems to have vanished, not just from Byzantine rule, but from the face of the earth. Nothing in the Arab accounts of the conquests betrays the fact that the Arabs were moving into the colourful world described by historians of late antiquity.” (Crone, *Slaves on Horses* 11f.)

¹¹⁰⁵ Kirkegaard, *Journalen JJ:167 (Søren Kirkegaards Skrifter 18)*.

¹¹⁰⁶ Mehmet II, who conquered Constantinople in 1453, conceived himself as a successor to the Greco-Roman historical cosmos alike with that of Islam. Whether any of his Roman or Byzantine predecessors would have “understood” this historical continuity – or that of each other – is not only impossible to answer, the whole

period of about two hundred years saw various efforts to develop universal concepts for understanding the turns of what we have come to understand as “history”.

As it has been surveyed here, the emerging universalism of Islam remains not an ideological, but an epistemological phenomenon. From a Late Antiquity Roman point of understanding, a theological matter could have been debated with any religious group acknowledging common rules of play with its Orthodox opponents,¹¹⁰⁷ but this was not how Islam appeared in the Roman world, and the Muslims who conquered the Near East must have seemed as unconceivable partners in a theological disputation as a group of Arab cavalymen at the chariot races in the Hippodrome. When *Islām* did accept common rules of play – as the ‘Umayyads took the daring step out of the safety of the desert, to meet the “Great Creature” face to face in a struggle to integrate the Late Antiquity Roman population with the Muslim caliphate – it was on a very practical level; the caliphs brushed aside the quibbles of Jews, Orthodox, Nestorians and Monophysites, regarding them as a matter of concern for the *ḍimmīs*, and aimed directly for the encompassing power of the universal emperor. Their failure to conquer Constantinople in 718 opened the possibility for a different understanding of their universal role in history, but it was only *one* such event which could have been used by their different Christian or Muslim opponents to represent a symbolic turning-point in their own conceptualisations of universal history.¹¹⁰⁸

Turning away from politics, is it possible to talk about a purely spiritual encounter between two universalist ideologies, one Islamic and one Byzantine? In fact the spiritual borderlands, precisely due to their spiritual character, seem as difficult to define as the unconscious dimension of the human psyche. In his criticism of the Iconoclasts, John of Damascus asked for the “spirit that is beyond the letter”,¹¹⁰⁹ relying upon an Aristotelean

question is absurd. Terms such as “decline” and “fall” only express the standpoint of someone who identifies with the past up to a certain point and fails, refuses or gives up efforts to find a “meaning” in what comes after it.

¹¹⁰⁷ Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* 6ff, 24ff, 149ff, 217ff, 234f. Such disputations could take place (and did so) under the *shahinshah* and the caliph as well as under the emperor, or even during the lifetime of the Prophet himself in Medina, but they took place under common rules and laws. What they show is that ideology, if anything, is a diverging, not a unifying matter (or to quote Wittgenstein, “the subject is not part of the world; rather, it is a limit of the world”; *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 5.632).

¹¹⁰⁸ The historical importance of this event can, of course, *only* be understood retrospectively, just as the entire *topos* of religious Orthodoxy and centralisation (cf. the introduction, note 37); both mar the legacy of the Isaurians and ‘Umayyads as defenders *and* corrupters of Christianity and Islam, respectively.

¹¹⁰⁹ Cf. *II Cor.* 3:6 “... for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life”. *Q* 96:1-5 has a similar dimension.

virtue of truth that is closer to *sophia* than to *episteme*: if Wisdom emanates from the One God, it would be equal to say that empirical understanding derives from a common reality. The problem is that, ignoring the *epoché* of the ideological *Geworfenheit*, we will have to deal with a multitude of incoherent “realities”, where even Monotheist beliefs turn Henotheist – everyone believes in his personal god, and in the eyes of the other, that god is a demon.

The reason to discuss the connection between ‘Abbasid intellectualism and the “Macedonian renaissance” has not been to claim that Byzantium might be seen a cultural offspring from the Islamic world, but to emphasise that the universal character of both religious commonwealths – and hence their challenge to each other – lies beyond religious dogma itself. The acquisition of a philosophical language of Islam resulted from its spread in the complex and confusing world outside the Arabic peninsula, and it provided the new Islamic elites with a cultural capital that, again, seems to have inspired the recovering Byzantine state to re-read its own history after the Iconoclast era. Mutually excluding each other, the two universalisms developed as answers to realities far beyond the ivory towers of their religious thinkers – they did not follow any inner logic or intention, only the urge to integrate that external world with their own perceptions about a common destiny of Mankind and a sacred meaning of its past.¹¹¹⁰

If these observations on the epistemological nature of our subject have seemed insufficient, we might make a last effort to reconsider the actual impacts of ideology in the time and era surveyed throughout the work.

The universal and the eternal

The last king of Assyria, says Diodorus Siculus, was called Sardanapalus, and his depravity exceeded that of all his predecessors.¹¹¹¹ He spent his entire time in the royal palace in Niniveh, where he used to dress as a woman, eat and drink and satisfy his lusts with concubines and catamites, leaving his once mighty empire vulnerable to its enemies. As the Babylonians under Nabopalassar (the father of Nebuchadnezzar II) sided with the Medes and

¹¹¹⁰ From this follows what might appear as a paradox: that Christianity was a Muslim heresy before Islam became a Christian heresy. John of Damascus, who defined it in the latter meaning, already belonged to the world of Islam: it was the caliph who – allegedly – protected him from the power of the emperor.

¹¹¹¹ Diodoros, *Bibliotheca* II:23-28.

the Persians and sieged the capital, Sardanapalus made himself a pyre in the palace and perished together with all his lust and splendour in a giant conflagration.¹¹¹²

Discussing the virtues of truth, Aristotle ponders the nature of human happiness or *eudaimonia*, a word derived from the word *daimon* and which can be translated as “good life,” “well-being” or “being blessed with a good genius”.¹¹¹³ To Aristotle, Sardanapalus exemplifies a primitive form of *eudaimonia* obsessed with vain lusts and carnal pleasures. It stands and falls with the feelings of the individual, aims for instant gratification and leaves no thought for tomorrow. As contrasted to it, the *eudaimonia* of the Greek city-state citizen is found in the “honour” (*arete*) which can earn him the admiration and respect of his peers and compatriots. More lasting than the former, it is related to the values and virtues of the social community where he is supposed to live. But both of them are inferior to the contemplative *eudaimonia* of the philosopher, which goes beyond the mortal existence of man and society. By appreciating what is eternally and universally good, the philosopher overcomes the limits of his own existence and the vanities admired by the crowd.¹¹¹⁴

This work has dealt with many perspectives of time, and on the spread of Islam in the Roman and Byzantine world it has noted a break deriving from Monotheist notions on eternity, a development which can be easily detected throughout the world of antiquity from Alexander the Great to the Prophet Muhammad. The philosophical concept of *eudaimonia* belongs to a world where ultimate judgment lay in the hands of the gods of nature; they represented a reality which man had no choice but to obey, however unjust he found it. It conflicted with the historical God of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, whose astronomical proportions implied the ultimate destruction of the physical world and the resurrection of Mankind to Hell or Heaven.¹¹¹⁵ The change in perspective presents us with an

¹¹¹² The story is totally apocryphic; Sinsharishkun was king of Assyria when Niniveh fell in 612 BC, though a vaguely similar story is reported on the Babylonian prince Shamashshkunukin some decades before.

¹¹¹³ *LSJ* v. εὐδαιμόνων.

¹¹¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nic. eth.* 1095a, 1098a-1099a. Cf. al-Farabi on Aristotle: Galston, *Politics and Excellence* 59ff.

¹¹¹⁵ To quote Albert Camus here, “Le christianisme a été obligé, pour s’étendre dans le monde méditerranéen, de s’helléniser et sa doctrine s’est du même coup assouplie. Mais son originalité est d’introduire dans le monde antique deux notions jamais liées jusque-là, celles d’histoire et de châtement. Par l’idée de médiation, le christianisme est grec. Par la notion d’historicité, il est judaïque ... On aperçoit mieux cette coupure en soulignant l’hostilité des pensées historiques à l’égard de la nature, considérée par elles comme un objet, non de contemplation, mais de transformation. Pour les chrétiens ... il faut maîtriser la nature. Les Grecs sont d’avis qu’il vaut mieux lui obéir. L’amour antique du cosmos est ignoré des premiers chrétiens qui, du reste, attendaient

ouroboros where religious sects who expected an end of the world often made a full circle back to the *après-nous-le-deluge* mentality of Sardanapalus.¹¹¹⁶

Eschatology clearly puts the reality of anything at stake. But again, the apocalyptic movements, the holy wars and the spiritual beliefs surveyed here do not encounter each other in a religious or philosophical hyperspace. Expectations upon the end and the future might make certain difference on an individual level and within the shorter spans of time, but the longer they try keep momentum going, the more they must take space into the consideration; for their impact is a result of movement and velocity, not of the mass which decides the terrestrial laws of gravity. Once *Geworfenheit* has taken place, it must take place again, and again, and again, and the longer it rejects the physical structure of a state, it is likely to suffer a lack of coherence. For whereas historicism can always deny the incoherence over time and space, historicism is itself the product of a society whose values are not shaped by pure intention, but by the limitations and possibilities of the world.

Christianity had once incorporated the symbols of a terrestrial peace and prosperity into the religious framework of Late Antiquity Orthodoxy.¹¹¹⁷ Islam contested its *eudaimonia* by its very appearance from the harsh realities of the desert, but the Arabic expansion also decelerated the apocalyptic expectations of the Muslims, creating a far-stretching stopover on the road from the *Dar al-ḥarb* to the *Dar as-Salām*: the *Dar al-Islām*, the place of earthly peace and authority of the caliph of God.¹¹¹⁸ Whereas one might speculate

avec impatience une fin du monde imminente.” Camus, *L’homme révolté*, Gallimard 1951 (1979) 235. – In fact, the early Jewish conception of *Sheol* seems to resemble the ancient Greek *Hades* much more than the Indo-iranian conception of Armageddon, Hell and Heaven introduced after the Babylonian captivity. Similarly, pessimistic interpretations of the world (Stoicism, Scepticism) enters the Greek world after Alexander the Great, possibly influenced from Indian or even Buddhist thinking, though this is much debated.

¹¹¹⁶ Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee* VIII.

¹¹¹⁷ Brown, “Images as a Substitute for Writing” 31ff., Maguire, “The Good Life” 246ff; cf. also *ibid.*, *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art*.

¹¹¹⁸ Galston, *Politics and Excellence* IV. This is not said to imply that Muslim perceptions of *ḡannah* are comparable to (for instance) the *Eikones* of Philostratos, but that both are subject to the world in which they are visualised. If the Qur’anic *ḡannah* is understood as a “Paradise of carnal lusts” (Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6122) a classical statue might as well be regarded a demonic idol or an object of sexual desire (*Vita S. Andreae Salis* 780C): it is merely a matter of whether things are considered acceptable in this world or in the next. Philosophical and religious attitudes can become vulnerable to criticism once they are seen as attributes of a self-perpetuating cultural capital rather than of a truth-seeking individual: the materialist will claim that it requires a certain level of material good to raise esoterical questions at all (Bourdieu, *op. cit.* (n881) 212f).

on the rise of eschatology and messianic movements as a consequence of disruptive climate changes, the acknowledgement of long-time *durées* within a new historical consciousness¹¹¹⁹ remains the most important fact in the process of how Islam came to terms with its own terrestrial boundaries – in short, how it came to be *in the world*.

Here we might return to the dream of Nebuchadnezzar for one last time and try to apply its literal meaning to reality. It is of course perfectly credible that a rock could break away from a mountain and smash a metal statue to pieces, especially if it has the right amount of matter and velocity, and the structure of the statue is weak. But could the rock afterwards start to grow all from itself and inflate until it filled the whole world?¹¹²⁰ The question is so metaphysical that I think we ought to stop here.

¹¹¹⁹ Khalidi on Arab astrology and conceptions of time, *Arabic Historical Thought* 118ff.

¹¹²⁰ I might end by quoting C G Jung's seminars on Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, a work which was of great help to me when I tried to put my conclusions together (abridged edition, Princeton 1998, 72f): "We must free ourselves from this most unscientific prejudice that our thoughts mean something in the sense of producing something. A thought is a phenomenon in itself; it proves nothing ... the idea that a world returns to non-being by perfect consciousness is a philosophical idea which we have to notice; but we cannot say that this makes or destroys a world. It only makes and destroys *our* world ... For things are *our* world, not *the* world."

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AJA	American Journal of Archaeology
<i>BBOM</i>	<i>Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs</i>
<i>BBS</i>	<i>Berliner Byzantinische Studien</i>
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
BZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
ChHist	Church History
CHRC	Church History and Religious Culture
CSSH	Comparative Studies in Society and History
DI	Der Islam
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
EHR	English Historical Review
<i>EI¹</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam (first edition)</i>
<i>EI²</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam (second edition)</i>
<i>FCIW</i>	<i>The Formation of the Classical Islamic World</i>
GOTR	Greek Orthodox Theological Review
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
<i>IU</i>	<i>Islamkundliche Untersuchungen</i>
JA	Journal Asiatique
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JbAC	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
JEH	Journal of Ecclesiastical History
JESHO	Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JÖB	Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
JSAH	Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians
JSAI	Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam

JWarb	Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes
LSJ	<i>Liddell, Scott, Jones: a Greek-English Dictionary</i>
NYRB	The New York Review of Books
ODB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i>
OSIA	<i>Oxford Studies in Islamic Art</i>
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PMS ^t	<i>Papers in Medieval Studies</i>
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
RA	Revue archéologique
RESEE	Revue des études sud-est européenne
SemKond	Seminarium Kondakovianum
SI	Studia Islamica
SIDA	Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis
SLAEI	<i>Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam</i>
STAC	<i>Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum</i>
TRW	<i>The Transformation of the Roman World</i>
WIH	War in History
ZRVI	Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta
ZTK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

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Summary

Seeing Eye to Eye: Islamic Universalism in the Roman and Byzantine Worlds, 7th to 10th Centuries

In the history of religion and cultures, the relationship between Byzantium and the Islamic World has quite often turned into a literary *topos* of dualistic proportions, not merely influenced by the Crusades or the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, but because the early Islamic historiographical tradition identified Byzantium as the Roman empire, one of the world empires to which the Prophet Muhammad had addressed his religious message.

Interestingly, the Byzantine sources seem to ignore the religious cause of controversy: they continuously refer to Muslims as “Arabs”, “Saracens”, “Ismaelites” or “Hagarenes”, names which had already been used to denote the pre-Islamic Arabs. The question whether the Byzantines considered Early Islam to be an universal religion on its own, or merely the faith of Pagan Barbarians, becomes yet more problematic due to a contemporary crisis in Byzantine culture and identity, to which the Arab conquests might have contributed. The epistemological point of observation on the universalist claims of Early Islam is, thus, not quite clear.

There are, however, several clues to the assumption that the first Caliphate – struggling to form a new world empire with Damascus as its capital – aimed at the integration of the former Roman subjects in the Near East, thus not merely caring about its own Arab co-religionists. At any rate, whether the ‘Umayyad caliphs tried to replace the Roman empire in its entirety or not, their efforts suffered a final blow at the gates of Constantinople in 717/718, when the new emperor Leo III took power, accompanied by Messianic expectations. Thirty years later, the ‘Umayyads fell victims to the ‘Abbasid Revolution, and the Islamic world oriented itself, literally speaking, towards the East, enhanced by a rising number of non-Arab converts in Iran and beyond.

A structuralist analysis of beliefs and religious practices in the borderlands between Byzantium and the Caliphate point at common problems in their relationship to each central power (problems which existed before this era as well) and point at the limits of a strictly constructivist approach to the subject. On the other hand, it becomes clear that a religion with universalist claims will find it difficult, not to say impossible, to make a lasting

historical impact if it lacks a stable geographical context and well-functioning communications within it.

To understand the identification of theological distinctions with political borders – a phenomenon which would put its imprints upon Medieval concepts of history in general – it is necessary to consider the emergence of historiographical traditions which kept within the frameworks of religious epistemology but had more worldly aims. Distancing themselves from earlier Christian and Islamic concepts of history which were marked by eschatological expectations of Judaeo-Iranian origin, they struggled to integrate the ancient historical, literary and scientific heritage of other cultures with their own religious epistemology of universal history, the result being synthetic rather than antithetic, and presenting them with a useful explanation to their growing geographical and historical cosmos. The conflict between different faiths here takes the character of a sociocultural language game (cf. Wittgenstein) which, because of common cultural values, enables encounters over the theological borders.

In short, Islam as a universal religion is here discussed as an epistemological and not an ideological phenomenon: the actual encounter between Muslims and Byzantines only takes place where they share a common epistemological field.

Zusammenfassung

Begegnung auf gleicher Augenhöhe: Islamischer Universalismus in der römisch-byzantinischen Welt (7. bis 10. Jahrhundert)

Das Verhältnis zwischen Byzanz und der Islamischen Welt ist nicht nur infolge der Eroberung Konstantinopels durch die Türken im Jahre 1453 oder den jahrhundertlang vorangegangenen Kreuzzügen zu einem historisch-literarischen Thema von fast dualistisch geprägten, symbolischen und religiösen Dimensionen geworden, sondern auch weil Byzanz aus der Sicht der Islamischen Geschichtstradition der direkte Nachfolger des Römischen Reichs war, und somit eines der Weltreiche, an die der Prophet Muhammad von Anfang an seine Botschaft gerichtet hatte.

Aus der Sicht der byzantinischen Quellen scheint ein religiöser Konfrontationsansatz anfangs zu fehlen; dort werden die Muslime als “Araber”, “Sarazenen”, “Ismaeliten” oder “Hagarener” betrachtet, womit man auch die vorislamischen Araber bezeichnet hatte. Die Frage, ob die Byzantiner den frühen Islam als (eigenständige) “Weltreligion” verstanden oder einfach als Häresie der arabischen Völker, ist um so mehr problematisch, als Identität und Selbstbildnis der Byzantiner im selben Zeitraum eine bedeutsame Krise zu durchgehen scheinen, die vielleicht von den arabischen Eroberungen ausgelöst oder jedenfalls gefördert wurde. Der epistemologische Observationspunkt ist also nicht ganz klar, wenn es darum geht, wie universalistische Ansprüche des frühen Islam von Aussen zu verstehen sind.

Es gibt andererseits deutliche Hinweise, dass das junge Kalifat seine kurz zuvor noch römischen Untertanen – also nicht nur seine arabischen Glaubensbrüder – in erheblichem Ausmaß einzubinden suchte, als es, mit Damaskus als Ausgangspunkt, die Gründung eines neuen Weltreichs betrieb. Letzteres blieb bei einem Versuch: die ‘Umayyadischen Bestrebungen, Konstantinopel zu erobern und somit den gesamten römischen *orbis mundi* zu integrieren, scheiterten 717/718, als in Byzanz Leo III an die Macht kam, was von christlich-messianischen Erwartungen begleitet wurde. Dreissig Jahre später fielen die ‘Umayyaden selbst der ‘Abbasidischen Revolution zum Opfer, und die islamische Welt orientierte sich – tatsächlich – ostwärts, gefördert von einer steigenden Zahl nicht-arabischer (vor allem iranischer) Konvertiten.

Eine strukturalistische Analyse von Glaubensvorstellungen in der Grenzzone zwischen Byzanz und dem Kalifat deutet in dieser Periode auf gemeinsame Probleme in deren Verhältnis zu ihren jeweiligen Zentralmächten (Probleme, die auch bereits vor dieser Periode existierten) und zeigt damit die Grenzen einer strikt konstruktivistischen Annäherung an das Thema auf. Gleichzeitig wird aber deutlich, dass eine universalistisch dimensionierte Religion ohne festen geographischen oder kommunikatorischen Kontext, sich historisch gesehen, wenn überhaupt, nur schwierig durchsetzen kann.

Um die Entwicklung theologischer Grenzen als politischer Trennwände zu verstehen – die das Geschichtsdenken des Mittelalters weithin prägen würden – wird die Entwicklung einer religiös-universalistisch geprägten Historiographie untersucht. Dabei geht es nicht um eine Literatur wie die frühchristliche oder frühislamische, die von eschatologischen Erwartungen mit jüdisch-monotheistischem Charakter geprägt war, sondern, darüber hinausgehend, um die systematische Integration älterer Geschichts-, Literatur- und Wissenschaftstraditionen in die geschichtsepistemologischen Felder der jüngeren Weltreligionen, wobei diese synthetisch statt antithetisch wirken und dadurch auch die Komplexität ihrer wachsenden Vergangenheiten und geographischen Verbreitungsräume erklären können. Der Konflikt zwischen verschiedenen Glaubensvorstellungen nimmt hier die Form von sozialen „Sprachspielen“ (Ludwig Wittgenstein) an, wobei auch Begegnungen über die Religionsgrenzen hinaus – unter Menschen die ein gemeinsames kulturelles Erbe teilen – ermöglicht werden.

Zusammenfassend wird Islam als Weltreligion hier nicht als ideologisches, sondern als epistemologisches Phänomen behandelt; die eigentliche Begegnung zwischen Muslimen und Byzantinern beginnt erst dort, wo die beiden einen gemeinsamen epistemologischen Gesichtskreis teilen.

Curriculum Vitae

Olof Heilo

Born in Lund, Skåne, Sweden, 1982

School leaving certificate from Katedralskolan, Lund 2001

M.A. in Greek, Arabic and Persian at the University of Lund 2005

Fields of study

History; history of Byzantium and the Near East; history of arts, languages and literature;
history of philosophy, religion and ideas.

Spoken languages

Swedish (mother tongue, with natural comprehension of other Scandinavian languages)

English (excellent command)

German (good command)

French (quite good command)

Languages related to fields of study

Latin (School leaving certificate, Lund 2001)

Classical and Byzantine Greek (M. A. main subject, Lund 2005)

Classical and Modern Standard Arabic (Fusha) (M. A. secondary subject; "Early Intermediate
Modern Standard Arabic" grade A at the International Language Centre, Cairo 2005)

Farsi / Persian (M. A. third subject; with field school practice in Iran, March to April 2005, as
part of Studieskolen, Copenhagen, Denmark)

Turkish (for beginners, A1-1, Sprachenzentrum Wien 2006)

Papers

Djävul eller förtalare? – om det grekiska ordet Diabolos ("Devil or Calumniator? – on the
Greek Word Diabolos"). Bachelor diploma work in Greek 2003. A summary was
published in the periodical *Minaret* 2006.

En konstantinopolitansk "apokalyps": Texten om statyerna av Niketas Choniates ("A Constantinopolitan apocalyptic: De Signis by Nichetas Choniates"). Master Diploma work in Greek 2004, published in the periodical *Dragomanen* 2006-7.

Profeten och kejsardömet: Arabiska traditioner om det romerska riket ("The Prophet and the Empire: Arabic Traditions on the Roman Empire"). Bachelor Diploma work in Arabic, published in the periodical *Bysantinsk Bulletin* 2006.

Academic lectures and other activities

Participant in the PhD Course *Religions in contact: from Late Antiquity to Byzantium in Asia Minor* at the Swedish Research Institute, Istanbul, 12 - 23 September 2004; gave a presentation of the Chora church *in situ* as part of the off-topic programme in Istanbul.

Participant in the seminar *Tre perspektiv på Bysans* ("Three Perspectives on Byzantium") at the respective Swedish Institutes in Istanbul, Athens and Rome, 27 October - 16 November 2008; held a lecture on recent research on "Islam in Byzantium".

Founding partner of *Nordiska Bysantinska Nätverket* ("Nordic Byzantine Network" NBN), with planned activities for 2011 - 2012, Uppsala, 2010.

Additional

Awards from the Royal Swedish Academy of Music (piano) 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1998.

Lebenslauf

Olof Heilo

Geboren in Lund, Schonen, Schweden 1982

Schulabschluss, Maturaexamen, Katedralskolan, Lund 2001

Mag. Phil., an der Universität zu Lund, 2005

Forschungsbereiche

Geschichte: Byzanz und Naher Osten, mit Bezug auf künstlerische und literarische Themen und besonderer Berücksichtigung philosophischer und religiöser Aspekte

Grundlegende Sprachkenntnisse

Schwedisch (Muttersprache, mit daraus folgendem Verständnis von Dänisch und Norwegisch)

Englisch (sehr gut)

Deutsch (gut)

Französisch (ziemlich gut)

Forschungsrelevante Sprachen

Latein (Maturaexamen)

Altgriechisch (Hauptfach der Magisterexamen)

Standardarabisch / Fusha (Nebenfach der Magisterexamen; "Early Intermediate Modern Standard Arabic" Stufe A am International Language Centre, Kairo 2005)

Farsi / Persisch (Nebenfach der Magisterexamen, mit Feldschulenpraktik in Teheran als Teilnehmer von Studieskolen, Kopenhagen 2005)

Türkisch (für Anfänger, A1-1, Sprachenzentrum Wien 2006)

Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten und Publikationen

Djävul eller förtalare? – om det grekiska ordet Diabolos ("Teufel oder Verleumder? – über das griechische Wort Diabolos"). Bachelor-Diplomarbeit (Griechisch) 2003. Eine Kurzfassung wurde in der Zeitschrift *Minaret* 2006 veröffentlicht.

En konstantinopolitansk "apokalyps": Texten om statyerna av Niketas Choniates ("Eine konstantinopolitanische Apokalypse: über "die Statuen" von Nichetas Choniates"). Master-Diplomarbeit (Griechisch) 2004, in der Zeitschrift *Dragomanen* 2006-7 veröffentlicht.

Profeten och kejsardömet: Arabiska traditioner om det romerska riket ("Der Prophet und der Kaiserreich: arabische Traditionen über das Römische Reich"). Bachelor-Diplomarbeit (Arabisch) in der Zeitschrift *Bysantinsk Bulletin* 2006 veröffentlicht.

Akademische Vorträge und andere Aktivitäten

Teilnehmer des Doktorandenkursus *Religions in contact: from Late Antiquity to Byzantium in Asia Minor* ("Religionen in Begegnung: von der Spätantike bis ins Byzantinischen Reich in Kleinasien") bei dem Schwedische Forschungsinstitut in Istanbul, 12. – 23. September 2004; anschliessend eine Präsentation *in situ*, bei der Chora-Kirche als Teil den Exkursionen in Istanbul)

Teilnehmer des Seminars *Tre perspektiv på Bysans* ("Drei Perspektive auf Byzanz") bei den Schwedischen Forschungsinstituten in Istanbul, Athen und Rom, 27 Oktober - 16 November 2008; mit einem Vortrag über das Thema "Islam in Byzanz"

Mitbegründer der *Nordiska Bysantinska Nätverket* ("Das Nordische Byzantinische Netzwerk" NBN), mit Programmplanung für 2011 - 2012, Uppsala 2010 -

Sonstiges

Stipendien der Königl. Schwedische Akademie der Musik (Klavierspiel) 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1998.