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Byzantium and the Arabs from the VIIth to XIth Century

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Introduction

The study of Byzantine history in Arab universities appears to some Arabs and non-Arabs to be a strange phenomenon. However, a quick look at the past shows that the two histories are linked and the interfaces between them do not need to be defined or demonstrated. Further, we can say that Byzantine history is as much a part of Arab history as it is of the history of the Greeks or their neighbors. Giving Byzantine history a place in Mediterranean universities is not only natural but is also necessary. It allows “reconciliation” with the past, by building bridges and creating links between the peoples of the Mediterranean area who have a lengthy common history. It will also foster a shared common future. As it is said: “though history can’t give us some lessons, it can be for us an example to meditate.”¹

To do this I will follow the evolution of the relationship between Arabs and Byzantium from ancient times until the 11th century and will show, if possible, that even though the Arabs and Byzantines were at war, they were not strangers to each other and war was not the predominant characteristic of this relationship. They were able to live together as different but not indifferent neighbors. Peace had its place as war had its time.

From the time of Roman rule over the Arab tribes to the rise of Islam in the seventh century the relationship between the Arab area and the Romano–Byzantine Empire evolved dramatically and were characterized by three periods.

The first period was the Roman rule from the first century to the beginning of the third century. This was a time of domination of the Arab, as they were called by the ancient authors. They were also known as Saraceni, Ishmaelite and Hagareni, but the most common term was Saraceni.² This terminology, which seems to be negative, was used during the Middle Ages by Byzantine chroniclers when relations with the Arabs or Muslims were poor.

The second period was the period of Christianization of some Arab tribes, including the

1 A. Ducellier, *Les Chemins de l'exil*, Paris, 1996, p.2.

2 M. T. Mansouri, “Les Musulmans à Byzance du VII e au XIe siècle”, in *Graeco–Arabica*, Vols. VII–VIII, Nicosie, 2000, pp.379–394, also published in Idem. *De Byzance et de l'Islam*, Mannouba, 2009.

Taghlib, Lakhm and Madhij/Asad, among others. The Byzantine and Christian influences went deep into the Arabian Desert as far south as the Island of the Arabs (*Jazirat al-Arab*). The tombstone of Imru' l Qais found at the end of the 19th century in the south of the original Syrian borders and identified by researchers by "the Namara inscription" showed the importance of the integration of the Arabs in Roman and Byzantine policy.³ Arabs led a dependent political existence and were in the cultural sphere of Christianity, but they had their own importance. Some historians call this period the "golden age of Arab Christianity" because the Arabs developed their own clergy and their own opinions about the nature of Christ.⁴ Their integration can be seen in the many ruins of this period that are still extant. In addition, some Christian saints are Arabs: St. Moses and St. Arethas, whose feast days fall on 7 February and 23 October, respectively. This period, however, was a preparation for the third phase.

The third period was characterized by the opposition of the Arabs allied to the inhabitants of Syria to Christianity as the official religion. These problems did not arise until after the Council of Nicaea in 325 in which some Arab clergymen participated and defended the Syriac Monophysite doctrine of the single nature of Jesus. This viewpoint cannot be considered only as a religious belief but it seems also that it was a political point of view: after this date, the Arabs and Syriac people rejected their dependent state and sought relations of absolute equality or, at least, *a feeling of absolute equality*. They opposed the power of the Byzantine religious position not only to change the belief but specifically to fight against the heavy fiscal policy.

In this period, social discontent and religious opposition went hand in hand. This is why, when Islam reached the southern boundary of the Byzantine Empire, the Muslims faced few difficulties in settling in Syria and Egypt, which remained Monophysite after the Council of Chalcedon in 451. In this context, the newly converted Islamic Arabs engaged in the conquest of Byzantine territory.

1. The Arab Conquest of Oriental Byzantine Provinces

I will not relate in detail this episode of history but will explain the evolution of the image of the Muslims and of the Arab conquests in the Christian sources through the Byzantine reaction to Islam.

The initial reaction was resistance as the Byzantines tried to explain the events in the south and east of their Empire. Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor, asked many Arab traders in Syria

³ Irfan Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs*, Washington D. C., 1981; Idem., *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, Washington D. C., 1982.

⁴ N. Pigulevskiya, *Araby u granits Vizantii i Irana IV-VI*, Moscow and Leningrad, 1964 (Arabic translation by S. Othman hashim, Kuwait, 1985).

who was Muhammad, what was his place in society, and did he lose power. The answers were the same: “He is from the middle Arabs”, which means that he was a simple, or a common, man: he was not fighting to reconquer a lost power, but was seeking a new one.

The second position involved the exchange of envoys and letters between Muhammad and Heraclius. The Arabic chronicles show that the Byzantine emperor was very receptive to the letters from the Prophet of Islam and the chronicles include his personal feelings and beliefs. They indicate that the Emperor accepted Islam but feared his subjects and so he kept his belief in Islam hidden.⁵

Some Byzantine chroniclers consider Islam and the Arab conquests to be a revolt of slaves because the Arabs were integrated into the Byzantine Christian sphere, and it seems that neither the Byzantine authors nor the Byzantine power understood the new religion or the new movement toward them.⁶

The author of the *Chronographia*, Theophanes, referred to the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, as “a false Prophet”. When explaining the defeat of the Byzantine army by the Arabs he wrote of the Arab soldiers: “*Some of the nearby Arabs received a small subsidy from the Emperor for guarding the mouths of the desert. At that time a patricius came to distribute the soldier’s wages. The Arabs came to get their pay as was customary, but the patricius drove them away saying “the Emperor pays his soldiers with difficulty; with how much more to such dogs as you”*”. He continued: “*The oppressed Arabs went to their fellow-tribesmen and showed them the way to the land of Gaza, which is the mouth of the desert for Mt. Sinai*”.⁷

Theophanes gave two reasons for the Byzantine defeat. The first was material: the Arab soldiers did not receive the same wages as the Byzantine soldiers. The second reason was mental: although the Arabs were defending the empire, they were badly treated and thus felt oppressed.

In the same way, we can understand why the Latin and the Greek texts of the late antiquity and the Middle Ages called the Arabs and Muslims Saraceni/Saracen and Hagarenoi/Hagareni.⁸

While these terms seem negative, the second is easy to understand—it means the sons of Agar or Hagar. However, the first has multiple interpretations. I will not discuss all the interpretations that have occupied philologists for many years, but will retain only one sense.⁹

The term Saracen is derived from the name of Sarah, the wife of Abraham, and in the

5 Hamidullah, *al-Wathaiq al-siyasiya li al-ahd al-nabawi wa al-khilfa al-rachida*, Beirut, 1987, pp.109–114, documents no. 26, 27, 28.

6 L'évêque Sébéos, *Histoire d'Héraclius*, éd. Macler, Paris, 1910, p.109, p.110.

7 Theophanes the Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, edited and translated by Harry Turtledove, Philadelphia, 1982, p.36.

8 Léon VI Le Sage, “Oraison funèbre de Basile I”, edited and translated by A. Vogt and I. Hausherr in *Orientalia Christiana*, vol. XXVI–1, April 1932, p.57.

9 Cf. Mansouri, *De Byzance et de l'Islam*, Publication de la Faculté des Lettres de Mannouba, Tunis, 2009.

original contexts of the use of this word we can understand that the Saracen are the slaves of Sarah, and that their action is nothing but a revolt of slaves against their masters.¹⁰ In both instances, the Muslims are descended from a woman, which Arab authors regard as not a good origin. We find this word used against Leo III by the iconophile opposition at the beginning of the eighth century, qualifying him as *sarakenophron* (σαρακηνόφρων), which means that he is like the Saracen or is influenced by them.¹¹ This word is also viewed as derogatory in the Byzantine mentality; otherwise, it would not have been used against Leo III by those who were against his religious policy. In the Arabic texts, we are told by the 10th century author al-Mas'udi that the emperor Theophilus (829–842) prohibited the use of the word Saraceni “because it is a lie and the Emperor did not lie ...” Unfortunately, Mas'udi did not reveal the name that was used by the Byzantines instead of the pejorative *saraceni* or *hagarenoi*.

It seems that the word used by the Arabs, and perhaps by the Byzantines in times of peace, is Ishmaelite, a word accepted by the Arabs and used in the Arabic texts when they refer to the origins of Arab people, who are “sons of Ismail”. But, when the Arab pressing was regarded as dangerous for the empire, the Byzantines saw in it a continuity of the traditional wars with the Persians; the Arabs appeared as conquerors like those of the past. In this case, the war was momental and there was a possibility for the Byzantines to reconquer what they had lost. But, in reality, the mentalities were changing in the Byzantine Empire from considering the Arab conquest as a slave revolt or a traditional war to other considerations, where in peace and war there are good and bad approaches that affect policy, religion and economic interests.

During the seventh and the eighth centuries, the Arabs built their own empire within the eastern and western boundaries of the Byzantine Empire, obliging the two powers to coexist through war and in peace. How did they live together, or near each other?

Although during this period the Arabs tried and continued to try to conquer Byzantium and in particular its capital, they kept in mind the Koranic text that reserved a chapter for the Byzantines entitled “Sourate al-Rum”. This said that the “*Romans/Rums were defeated in the low earth but after their defeat they will learn*”, and also the Hadith (the saying of the Prophet Muhammad) who recognized the possibility of the Byzantine Empire being born again every century”.¹²

These two important texts of Islam recognize the difficulty or perhaps the impossibility of conquering the Byzantine territory, and also the possibility of Byzantium being born again. We can understand that, in the mind of the first Arabs, war against the Byzantines was not really to conquer them or to occupy their territory but to frighten them. That is why we have to look for peaceful relations and to ask why historians need to demonstrate only the periods of

10 al-Mas'udi, *Tanbih*, p.168; cf. Ph. Sénac, *L'image de l'autre, Histoire de l'Occident Médiéval Face à l'Islam*, Flammarion, Paris, 1983, p.14.

11 N-C. Kourakou, *La propagande impériale byzantine persuasion et réaction (VIII-Xe siècles)*, Athènes, 1994, p. 279.

12 Koran, XXX, 2.

conflict and war. In the relationship between the Arabs and Byzantines, many historians have shown us the different battles and have taken us into the battles against the Arabs or against the Byzantines, sometimes with such great precision they could have been eyewitnesses. *However, they forget that war is not the only field where people meet in history and that the noise of war can hide a peaceful feeling or peaceful will.*

2. Evolution of the Relationships

When the Umayyad dynasty was installed in power, the Umayyad caliphs sent many expeditions against Byzantine territory; they reached Constantinople and surrounded it for more than a year in 717.

Until 740 (the battle of Akroinon), the Arab expeditions were massive. Over sea and land they reached the depths of the Byzantine territory as far as Asia Minor and to the Aegean islands. However, from 680 to 693 there was trouble in the Islamic world because of the civil war between Ali and Mu'awiya. The first peace treaty with the Byzantines was signed by Mu'awiya to gain security from this conflict and to provide an opportunity to challenge the last orthodox caliph.

When the civil war ended and Mu'awiya settled his power, the war against Byzantium was engaged again for many reasons:

- to satisfy his soldiers, who were in need of booty;
- to continue the conquests engaged in by his predecessors;
- to satisfy the religious feeling of the Prophet's Friends or Companions, who considered themselves to be the protectors of the Muslim message; and
- to act like a caliph and, like all who have inherited from the Prophet, to apply his message of universal conversion in which fighting is necessary because it is sacred.

This shows that the reasons were not only religious but were also material. The Arabic texts have conserved many words and thoughts that show that, during the Umayyad period, war was fought for many reasons other than religious reasons. However, it was necessary to regard the religious feeling of the Umayyad subjects as a visible motive to provide legitimacy for the caliphal actions.

When the Persians were within Muslim territory, Byzantium resisted and concentrated all its efforts, orienting them toward its territory. That is why the Umayyad caliphs or kings were interested in the region. However, after the battle of Akroinon in 740 and the first Arab defeat of Byzantium, the nature of war changed from being rapid expeditions to a new kind that we can call "guerre d'usure" or "guerre de tranchées", as it was referred to in France during the First World War.

The expeditions became concentrated in the boundaries or frontiers and we can say that it

became a period of knowledge between the two enemies.¹³

The Byzantines and Muslims could isolate the theatre of war and at the same time could seek mutual understanding and knowledge. The people outside the conflict zone mixed, and many cases of mixed marriage between Muslims and Byzantines are preserved in both Arabic and Greek texts.¹⁴ However, while in the Arabic texts the cases are presented as exceptional and scarce, for the Byzantines the story of Digenis Akritas is famous and many songs have preserved this story of the marriage of a Syrian general with the daughter of Basil Dukas, patrikios of Cappadocia.

When in 750 the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyad and took power, the relations were based on emulation and competition, but with a mutual knowledge of the frontiers. The eastern boundaries were for Byzantium an area of defense, but for Muslims they were considered to be a *thoughour* or a front of conquest, which means not simply a front of conquest but a limit for their empire and thus they would not settle any garrison beyond the zone of mountains situated between the two empires. The purpose of the Abbasids' expeditions was not to build cities or to establish garrisons but to destroy Byzantine garrisons, to acquire booty and prisoners and then to return home. The most famous leader, Haroun al-Rashid, led many expeditions against Byzantine territory, reaching as far as Ankara, but he did not settle any garrison in the territory.

The Abbasids helped some Byzantine rebels such as Bardas Skleros, but they transferred the war in a kind of concurrence. This appears on the occasion of a visit of Byzantine ambassadors, especially in the 10th century. For example, when al-Muktadir (908–932) received an envoy sent by Constantine VII, Hilal al-Sabi told us that the Abbasid chancery “furnished in his honour the Residence with beautiful trappings and decorated with splendid implements. The Chamberlains and their lieutenants in accordance to their ranks were all in proper formation at its gates, corridors and passageways. The soldiers of different ranks and in excellent attire were drawn in two lines and mounted on animals with saddles of gold and silver and near them were the reserve horses in similar elegance, displaying many types of arms and equipment ... the markets, the streets roofs and alleys of the eastern part of the city (Baghdad) were filled with crowds of spectators.”¹⁵

13 M. T. Mansouri, “l’Image de Byzance dans les Sources Arabes”, *Mélanges L. Cardaillac*, Zaghuan, Tunisie, 1995, pp.465–488.

14 P. Lemerle, “L’histoire des Pauliciens d’Asie Mineure d’après les Sources Grecques”, in *Travaux et Mémoires*, V, Paris, 1973, pp.1–14; see especially p.77; cf. M. T. Mansouri, “Les musulmans à Byzance du VII^e au XI^e siècle”, in *Graeco-Arabica*, Vols. VII–VIII, Nicosie, 2000, pp.379–394. Idem. “Présence Byzantine en Terre d’Islam (VII^e–XI^e siècle): Sources d’informations et moyens de propagande”, Colloque *Orient-Occident (IX–XV^e s)*, Paris, Editions du Temps, 2000, pp.235–253, publié également par les organisateurs, in *Histoire Médiévale et Archéologie*, CAHMER, Université de Picardie, Vol. 11, Amiens, 2000, pp.187–199. Idem. “Déplacement forcé et déportations de populations sur les frontières entre Byzance et l’islam (VII^e–X^e siècles)”, in Colloque *Migrations et Diasporas Méditerranéennes (cc–XVI^e siècles)* Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris, 2002, pp.107–114.

15 Hilal al-Sabi’, *Rusum dar al-Khilafa*, éd. Awwad, Baghdad; pp.11–14, an English translation by Elie A. Salem, Beirut, 1977, pp.16–18, 108.

The protocol of Byzantium and the Abbasids was constructed to fascinate and impress the adversary and to express another kind of superiority, as if they were presented with another field of rivalry or another kind of war without war.

The ascension of the Macedonian dynasty to power in Byzantium between 867 and 1025 brought the relationships into balance. Certainly, the Byzantines' success in reconquering some parts of the north of Syria destroyed the Hamdanid state or emirate and brought them finally under their protection.

But this does not mean that the relationships were only oppositional. The exchange was ancient and was never disturbed by the war: exchange of envoys continued as did trade and the movement of men and women across the frontiers; we can thus speak of multi exchanges.

3. *The Multi Exchanges*

Ambassadors and Envoys

From the rise of Islam, the exchange of ambassadors was permanent, but the reasons and purposes of this exchange were not the same for the two empires.

1. The Byzantine Envoys

The reasons for the presence of the Byzantine envoys are limited compared with the Muslim envoys and can be divided into four important categories.

1. The first reason was the defense of the Christian communities living under Muslim rule, and especially the *Melkites*. Like the Jews, who have the same status as Christians among Muslim people, many Christians stayed living among the Muslims as dhimmis or protected communities. But among the Christians were the Melkites, who were obedient to the Byzantine church and who considered themselves to be under the rule of both the Emperor and the Caliph. In addition, Byzantium, in its opposition to western Christianity, tried to appear as the defender of all Christians and thus limited the western influence on the non-Melkite Christians. Thus, many presents were sent from Constantinople to facilitate the missions and to encourage the caliph to take care of his Christians subjects.¹⁶

2. The second purpose of the envoys was the liberation of prisoners of war. As discussed above, the Muslims armies who conquered Byzantine territory returned to Muslim territory taking many prisoners. The Byzantines sent envoys to negotiate and discuss the exchange of the prisoners. This occurred annually because the military machine was active every year between spring and autumn and peace negotiations took place in winter. The envoys discussed

16 The Melkite is the Orthodox community who lived, and still lives, in Egypt. Cf. M. Kamel, *Aspects de l'Égypte Copte*, Berlin, 1965; A. Fattal, *Le Statut Légal des Non Musulmans en Pays d'Islam*, Beyrouth, 1958.

the conditions and the value of this special exchange. This was the same for the Muslim envoys to Byzantium.¹⁷

3. The third reason for the presence of an envoy was intermittent and was associated with negotiations in special situations. For example, some rebels refuged to Baghdad, as was the case with Bardas Skleros, who was assisted by the Abbasids. On many occasions, the Byzantine emperor Basil II (970–1025) sent envoys to discuss the possibility of extraditing Skleros. However, the Muslims refused and instead negotiated his return and his amnesty, thus succeeding in this way.¹⁸

4. The last reason for envoys was when Muslims, especially during the Umayyad rule, asked for engineering assistance. When building the mosques of Medina and Damascus and the caliphal palaces, they asked for workers, engineers and material such as mosaics. On these occasions, the Byzantine emperors sent presents and envoys as a sign of friendship and “bon voisinage”.

Otherwise, after the Crusades, the relationship changed and the relations became friendlier and the Byzantine power felt closer to the Muslims than to the western Christians for many reasons.¹⁹

2. The Muslim Envoys

Muslims sent envoys to Byzantium for many reasons.

1. The first kind of ambassadors sent from Medina, Damascus, Baghdad or Fatimid Cairo had a religious aim. They sought the conversion of the Byzantine emperors and tried to show that Islam was right and Christianity was wrong. Islam, as the last revelation and prophecy, recognized that Christianity was in Islam but not of it and therefore the Byzantine emperor must recognize Islam and accept it at the top of the Pantheon. Such envoys were sent in periods of strength of Muslim powers, such as under the Prophet and under the rule of Harun al-Rashid and al-Mu'tasim or al-Mu'izz when he was at Mahdiya in Tunisia or when he was at Cairo.²⁰

17 Ch. Verlinden, “Guerre et traite comme sources d’esclavage dans l’empire byzantin aux IXe et Xe siècles”, in *Graeco-Arabica*, V, Athènes, 1993, pp.207–212; M. Campagnolo-Pothitou, “Les échanges de prisonniers arabes entre Byzance et Islam aux IXe et Xe siècles”, in *Journal of Oriental and African Studies*, VI, Athènes, 1995, pp.1–56; M. T. Mansouri, “Les Musulmans à Byzance du VII e au XIe siècle”, in *Graeco-Arabica*, vols VII– VIII, Nicosie, 2000, pp.379–394.

18 Tabari, *Tarikh*, ed. A. Ibrahim, Le Caire, 1974, IX, p.123, 151; M. Canard, “Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les arabes”, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XVIII, Washington D. C., 1964, pp.44–45.

19 Nicétas Choniates, *Histoire*, Bonn, 1835, p.731. D. J. Geanakoplos, “Byzantium and the Crusades (1261–1453)”, in *History of the Crusades, XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. W. Hazard, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1975, pp.42–43, 89, 93.

20 M. T. Mansouri, “La Mosquée de Constantinople à l’époque Byzantine”, in *Buzantiaka*, t.11,

2. Sometimes the Muslim powers sent learned religious thinkers or scholars from high ranks to discuss religious subjects with the Byzantines, such as the embassy of al-Baqillani sent by al-Mu'tasim under the rule of Basil II to discuss with the Byzantines astronomy and the evolution of the stars and the moon. In the same case, we can add the ambassadors who were sent to seek special books on the sciences (medicine, astronomy and astrology, and agricultural treatises among others).²¹

3. Ambassadors were sent to ask for safety for the Muslims living in the Byzantine Empire, especially in Constantinople as prisoners or traders. As there were many churches in the Muslim world, there was a mosque in the capital of the Empire and the Muslim powers maintained the building and its furniture and they selected its Imam. Sometimes in the context of the competition between the Fatimids and the Abbasids, everyone from within the two caliphs insisted that the prayer must be in his name, that is, that the Imam must say the prayer in the name of the Abbasid or the Fatimid caliph. For this, the envoys were sent either from Baghdad to maintain the prayer for the Abbasid caliph or from Mahdia or Cairo for the same reason.²²

4. At times the Muslim powers asked for help with engineering and this, as discussed above, was an occasion of peaceful and friendly relations between Byzantines and Muslims. For example, in the middle of the 11th century, when the Nile was dry and the crops had failed, the Fatimids asked Byzantium to send them cereals. However, the pressure that the Seljukid's were placing on Byzantium's oriental provinces prevented them from sending this.

These purposes and aims of ambassadors show that the relations were not only conflicting but also peaceful.

4. *Exchange of Traders*

I am saying nothing new when I say that war cannot stop trade and perhaps encourages it. But, for Byzantium, the eastern trade had been conducted since ancient times when the Arabian Desert was opened and the Roman and Byzantine area was the traditional way that incense and silk crossed through Arab lands. Muhammad B. Abd Allah B. Abd al-Muttalib, before becoming the Prophet, traded with Byzantine Syria before the birth of Islam. After the rise of Islam, the ways were certainly changed and perhaps lessened but were not interrupted.

With the Arab conquests, the Byzantine territory became closer and the going not only

Thessalonique, 1991, pp.117–127.

21 al-Baqillani was sent by Baghdad to discuss religious ideas with Byzantine clerics in 380H/990; see his biography in *Madarik 'Iyad*, VII, pp.57–68.

22 Ibidem.

became easier toward the peripheral provinces but also in the depths of Byzantium. This is why we find in Byzantine texts such as *The Book of the Prefect* (Τὸ Ἐπαρχικὸν Βιβλίον) of Leo VI much information about Syrian traders who had lived in Constantinople for more than 10 years and that many products from Syria and Iraq (textiles, silk and the fashions of Baghdad) were regulated by the *eparkikon Biblion*.²³ The Muslim traders at the end of the ninth century were present in the Byzantine Empire and had their own hotels, similar to the Italian Amalfitans, the Venetians and the Russians in the 10th century.²⁴

Unfortunately, we have no information on Byzantine traders in the Muslim world in this period. Perhaps the ideology of Byzantium did not allow them to go out of the Empire. Alternatively, perhaps the Byzantines left trading for others because they considered themselves to be the center of the world and products would come to them until their Empire collapsed, or because Byzantine wealth was based particularly on landed property. But at the same time we find another kind of Byzantine, the pilgrims who lived for a short time in the Muslim eastern territory. A little information about them is conserved in Arabic texts. It seems that they belonged to the high Byzantine society and, in general, the texts say they were members of the imperial family.

However, their reception in the Muslim territory depended on the nature of the relations. We can also gain information about many important women in the Muslim world, especially in the Abbasid court, who were originally Byzantines. However, because of the social integration we do not know much about them, except for certain caliph's wives such as the mother of al-Mustansir, the mother of al-Mu'tadhid, the mother of al-Muqtadir or the mother of al-Mu'tasim. Most of the Abbasid caliphs had a wife and a mother from Byzantium. Many other Byzantines were in the Abbasid court, such as translators and interpreters. They remained Christian and perhaps not dhimmis!

We are certain that Muslim merchants were living among Byzantines during the Middle Ages although this is not admitted by some of the religious people. A text from the beginning of the 13th century illustrates this contradictory situation.

Jazari, a historian from the north of Syria, when told that his father was discussing with a certain Hajj Abd Allah b. Muhammad al-Sinjari, a pious Muslim who was on a pilgrimage and who spent 12 years in Constantinople, said "*When my father learnt that he lived 12 years in Byzantium he was astonished and said For him Hag Abdallah is it possible that a Muslim who went to pilgrimage can be settled among the Rums/Byzantines? He answered "My brother if I describe for you this City (he means Constantinople) you will understand better and know that those who live there don't have any fear. They can do what they want without any critical and*

23 Léon VI Le Sage, *Le livre du préfet*, edited and translated by J. Nicole, Genève, 1893 translated into English by A. E. Boak in *Journal of Economic and Business History*, 1929 and by E. Freshfield in *Roman Law in the Later Roman Empire*, Cambridge, 1938.

24 Yahiya d'Antioche, *Histoire*, edited and translated by I. Kratchovsky and A. Vasiliev, *Patrologie orientale*, t.XXIII, Fascicule, 3, 1932, pp.447–448.

at the same time we can live in a good way and make good profits".²⁵

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to refer to one of the most famous men of this relationship who wrote many letters to the kings of his time. This is Nicolas I, called Mystikos, Patriarch of Constantinople, who said in a letter to the Muslim caliph at the beginning of the 10th century, through the Emir of Crete:

To the most Glorious and brilliant Emir of Crete, My beloved friend

"... There are two lordships on earth, and shine out like the two mighty beacons in the firmament. They ought, for this very reason alone, to be in contact and brotherhood and not, because we differ in our lives and habits and religion, remain alien in all ways to each other, and deprive themselves of correspondence carried on in writing".²⁶

Can we find here a clear lesson or a good example?

²⁵ M. Izeddin, "Un texte arabe inédit sur Constantinople Byzantine", *Journal Asiatique*, 246, 1958, pp.454–455.

²⁶ R. J. H. Jenkins and L. G. Westerink, *Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople, Letters*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D. C., 1973, pp.3 et passim; cf. A. Ducellier, *L'Église Byzantine entre pouvoir et esprit (313–1204)*, Desclée, Paris, 1990, p.230.