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A selection of writings on the relations between
the Byzantines and the ‘Abbasids.

BY

Maria Vaiou

Warfare

Frontier raids

The capture of Melitene in 750-1.

The 'Abbasids attached special importance to the Byzantine frontier which stretched along the mountains of Taurus and Anti-Taurus for practical and ideological reasons. They launched annual sayfiyya (summer) and shatiyya (winter) raids along the frontier to collect booty, and take prisoners from the Byzantine frontier areas which were bases for raiding. The conduct of jihad along the frontier was an important affair in the 'Abbasid state, and had a ritual function aiming at enhancing the status of the leaders of jihad in the eyes of the Muslim Community since the Byzantines had become the traditional enemy of Islam. Byzantine attacks were directed against the Muslim frontier-fortresses with the aim at frustrating the efforts of the caliphs al-Saffar (749–54) and al-Manṣūr (754–75) to secure their frontier-defences. Similarly, frontier warfare became persistent in the reigns of the caliphs al-Mahdī (775–85) and Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809) as they were mostly concerned with the security of their frontier defences. The following extract refers to emperor Constantine V's (741–75) capture of Melitene (Malatya) and the fate of frontier cities like Melitene which were frequently the target of raids suffering destruction and depopulation; this raid instigated in 751 Salih b. 'Ali's (d. 769) raid aimed at avenging the emperor Constantine V's attacks on Melitene, Qaliqala (Theodosiopolis), Kamkh (or Kamakh), and Claudias earlier in this year. Melitene was destroyed in 756 when Constantine resumed the offensive and in 758 when he prevented its reconstruction by the Muslims.

After these events Constantine crowned his son Leo emperor and straightaway marched against the Saracens. He came to the town of Melitene, which he took by siege and carried off from there a great number of captives and much booty.

Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople Short History, Text, Eng. Trans., and Comm. by C. Mango (Washington, DC, 1990), 143.

Byzantine – Arab Frontier

Themata

De Thematribus is a historico-geographical treatise compiled by the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos or under his auspices. It relates that the creation of the themes took place as a result of the Arab invasions. The Arab offensive and destruction of villages and cities caused the division of the previously

unitary empire into themes. In addition, the location of the enemy invasion routes, their number, and the size of their armies in land and sea, no doubt influenced the thematic organisation. The function of the themes, tactics and strategic structures, such as the creation of new ones, were related to the empire's dealing with Muslims changes in the context of Byzantine-Arab warfare.

...Mankind was divided up [again, this time] into themata, when the Roman Empire began to be mutilated and truncated and reduced to a small compass by the Arabs...When the Arabs began to take the offensive against the Romans and to devastate their villages and cities, the Emperors of that day were compelled to cut up the [previously] unitary Empire into small fragments...The successors of Heraclius cut up their Empire into small fragments—and cut up, in particular, the military formations—because they had no place or means for exercising their own Imperial authority.

Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Thematribus*, ed. A. Pertusi (Rome, 1952), 12-3; A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his world* (London, 1973), 243.

Thughur

The 'Abbasids devoted their efforts to the creation of a sophisticated fortification system along the al-Thughur (the frontier) extending along the line from Tarsus in Cilicia northeastward as far as Qaliqala and beyond, with settlements of troops recruited from Syria, al-Jazirah and Khurasan supplemented by mutawwi'a and ghazis (volunteers) who were encouraged by gifts of land and shares in any booty. In 786 Harun al-Rashid came to power, and the frontier-defences became his priority. He formed a new frontier district called al-'Awasim, a buffer zone between northern Syria and the Cilician Thughur, extending from Antioch to the Euphrates.

The Thughûr are divided into two sections the Thughûr of Syria and the Thughûr of Mesopotamia. These are divided each from the other by the Jabal al-Lukkâm.

The Mesopotamian fortresses are Malatiyyah—which the Greeks call Maltâyâ, and it lies a mile from the Euphrates; Kamakh, to the west of the Euphrates; Shamshât, also west of the Euphrates; Al-Bîrah, east of the Euphrates; Hisn Mansûr; Kala'at ar-Rûm, west of the Euphrates; Hadath al-Hamrâ; Mar'ash, first built by Khâlid ibn al-Walîd, rebuilt by the Khalif Marwân ibn al-Hâkim, and afterwards again by the Khalif al-Mansûr.

The Syrian fortresses are Tarsûs, Adhanah, Al-Massîssah, and Hârûniyyah, built by Hârûn al-Rashîd, in the early days of his father's Khalifate. Also Sîs, called Sîsah; when the Armenians took it they made it the capital of their kingdom (of Little Armenia); Ayâs , called also Ayâgh-this last is the port of Sîs on the sea'.

Dimashqî., 214; G .Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems: a description of Syria and the Holy Land from AD 650 to 1500* (2010), 38.

Cities of the Syrian Thughur – Frontier Fortress

Tarsus

Tarsus is a city of the Syrian Thughur (or Frontier Fortress). It lies 6 leagues from Adhanah. The city is divided by the river al-Baradan (Cydnus). The tomb of al-Mâmûn is to be seen here. ..Tarsûs has double walls and a broad ditch, also six gates. This Frontier City of the Muslims remained in their hands till the year 354 965, when Nikfûr (Nicephorus) , King of the Greeks , having conquered the Thughûr (Frontier Fortresses) and al-Massîssah, laid siege to Tarsûs , and took it by capitulation. Then all the Muslims who would, were allowed to leave the city, taking with them their goods. Those who remained had to pay the capitation-tax. ..

Al-Yaqûbî., iii, 526; Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, 378.

On the life in Tarsus

Ibn ʿawqal's account of the city of Tarsus, which was written after its Byzantine reconquest, along with that of Abû ʿAmr ʿUthmân al-Tarsûsî 's (d. 1011) Siyar al-Thughûr, written during the Muslim rule of the city, are important sources of its history shedding light on conditions of living, topography, organisation, intellectual and religious life, the undertaking of jihād, the conduct of the fighters, and ascetics, and valuable insights into the last days in the city prior to the Byzantine reconquest.

Between this city and the Greek territory rises a high mountain range, an offshoot of the Jabal Lukkâm which acts as a barrier between the two worlds (of Islam and Christendom). There are among the population of Tarsûs many persons of discernment and wisdom, men of prudence and eminence who understand various matters, and also possess wisdom and intelligence and watchfulness. It is stated that there are usually in this city 100,000 horsemen, and there were very near this number at the time I (Ibn

Haukal) visited the city. And the reason thereof is this: that from all the great towns within the borders of Sijistân, Kirmân, Fârs, Khurasân and the Jabal (Media), also Tabaristân, Mesopotamia and Adharbaijân, and from the countries of al-Îrâk, al-Hijjâz, al-Yaman, Syria and Egypt, and al-Maghrib (Morocco), there is no city but here in Tarsûs a House (*Dâr*) for its townsmen. Here the Ghâzîs (or Warriors of the Faith) from each particular country live. For when they have once reached Tarsûs they settle there and remain in garrison. Among them prayer and worship are most diligently performed, and funds are sent to them, and they receive alms, rich and plentiful. For there is hardly a Sultan who does not send here some auxiliary troops; and men of riches give their aid for arming and despatching thither the volunteers who have devoted themselves to this service. ...

Ibn ʿawqal, 122; Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, 377.

Jund al-Awasim (of the Strongholds)

The territory towards the Greek frontier consisting of the territories from Antioch westward to the coast and to Aleppo and Manbij was created into a new jund called al-Awasim. North of this was the district al-Thughur.

In the days of the Khalifs Omar and Othman the Muslim frontier fortresses lay round Antâkiyyah Antioch, and the districts which later Ar Rashîd formed into the Jund of the Awâsim. These are Kûra Kûrus, Al-Jûmah, Manbij, Antâkiyyah , Tûzîn, Bâlis, and Rusâfah-Hishâm. What lands lay beyond , the Muslims made their raids into, and these the Greeks raided likewise.

Ibn Faqîh, 111; Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, 36.

When the Commander of the Faithful al-Rashîd, Hārûn b. al-Mahdî, became caliph, he detached Qinnasrîn and its districts (kuwar) and made it one jund. He also detached Manbij, Dulûk, Ra ‘bîn, Qûrus, Antioch and Tîzîn, and called them “al- ‘awâsim”, because the Muslims take refuge in them, and they provide them with refuge and protection when they return from their expeditions and come out of the frontier (thaghr). He made Manbij their capital.

Al-Baladhuri, ed. M. J de Goeje, (Leiden, 1866), 132; tran. M. Bonner, *Aristocratic violence and holy war: studies in the jihad and the Arab–Byzantine frontier* (New Haven, 1996), 86.

Arab sea raids

An inscription on the fortification of Attaleia in 915/6 reflects the problems of the siege as a result of the Muslim sea power.

The year (Cross) 6424. By the provision of the wise and all-good emperors Constantine and Zoe [Leo], a man truly amazing in his stratagems, wisely secured this city with a second wall, showing it to be the most secure of all cities. He has saved it now also by the hand of the Lord to the glory of Christ and boast of the Romans and rout of the impious sons of Agar. The entire work was completed in the six thousand and four hundred and twenty fourth year [of the creation] in the fourth indiction.

H. Grégoire, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure* (Paris, 1922), 303.

Al- Ma'mūn's (d. 833) campaigns against the Byzantines

The caliphs' Hārūn al-Rashīd, al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'taṣim personal participation in the campaigns against the Byzantines legitimized their authority as leaders of the Community and by their adoption of the role of the ghāzī-caliph they emphasised their Caliphal religious authority as defenders of Islam. Al-Mamūn's campaigns coincided with his Caliphal claim to interpret the Prophetic sunna against the power of the ulama' (religious scholars) and the caliph's initiation of the mihna (inquisition) movement, and intended to justify his role as a God-guided imam, and enhance his religious prestige in the eyes of the Community.

In 218 AH/833 AD, he led an expedition against the Byzantines. He had undertaken to rebuild Tyana, a Greek town at the entrance to the pass that leads to Tarsus. He offered all the strongholds of the Byzantines the chance to capitulate and invited them to embrace Islam, giving the choice of Islam, poll-tax or the sword. Christianity was brought low and a large number of Greeks submitted to paying the tax.

Al-Mas 'ūdī, vii, 94; *The meadows of gold. The Abbasids by Mas 'udi*, translated and edited by P. Lunde and C. Stone (London, 1989), 218.

Theophilos's (d. 842) attack of the city of Zapetra (Sozopetra) in 837

The emperor Theophilos's sack of Zapetra in 937, which was considered by Byzantine historians to have been the birthplace of the caliph al-Mu'taṣim provides a parallel with the sack of Amorion in 838 by the caliph,

which was the birthplace of the Amorian dynasty (820–67). It resulted in the caliph's decision to invade the city of Amorion as an act of vengeance.

In this year (223) Tawfīl ibn Mikhā'il, the leader of the Byzantines, attacked Zibaṭrah with his men, taking its inhabitants captive and destroying their city. He then proceeded immediately to Malaṭyah and attacked its people and the inhabitants of some of the Muslim fortresses besides. He took Muslim women captive-it is said more than a thousand-and mutilated the Muslim men who came into his hands, putting out their eyes and cutting off their ears and noses.

Al-ḥabarī, ser. 3, 2: 1234; Tr. S. P. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the poetics of the 'Abbāsīd Age* (Leiden, 1991), 198.

Al-Mu 'taṣīm's attack of Amorion

The campaign of the caliph al-Mu'tasim against Amorion in 838 was the last of the 'Abbasids' far-reaching campaigns against the Empire, and by the year 842 the period of 'Abbasid Caliphal authority had passed.

Then, when al-Mu 'taṣīm had vanquished Bābak, he said, 'Which city of the Byzantines is the most defended and the best fortified?' And he was told, 'Ammūriyyah-not one of the Muslims has embarked against it since the appearance of Islam, and it is the well-spring and root of Christianity and more honoured among them than Constantinople.'

Al-ḥabarī, ser. 3, 2: 1236; Tr. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the 'Abbāsīd Age*, 198.

Views on 'Abbasids and their rule

Byzantine description

The ninth-century Byzantine chronicle of Theophanes refers to the 'Abbasids as Maurophoroi: black was the 'Abbasid colour. The 'Abbasid adoption of black symbolised power and the need to differentiate themselves from the Umayyads who were associated with the white colour; it was also connected to the 'dissemination of prophetic traditions of a messianic nature'.

In this year the people of the interior of Persia—known as Khorasians or Black-cloaks—moved against Marwan and his entire dynasty, who had ruled after Muhammad the false prophet up until Marwan: that is, the line of him who was known as the son of Umayya.

The Chronicle of Theophanes: Anni mundi 6095–6305 (A.D. 602–813), tr. H. Turtledove (Penns, 1982).

A traveller's perception of Muslim rule in Jerusalem

Finally, I must tell you how Christians observe God's law in Jerusalem and Egypt. The Christians and pagans have this kind of peace between them, such that if I were travelling, and the camel or donkey which bore my poor luggage were to die on the way, and I left all my belongings there without any guardian, and went off to the city for another animal, I would find everything unharmed when I came back. Such is the peace there. But any traveller who stays in a city, or goes on a journey by sea or any other way, and is found walking by night or by day without a paper or a stamp issued by one of the kings or princes of that country, is sent to prison straightway until such time as he can explain that he is not a spy.

Bernard, *Itinerary*, 23; tran. in F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem. The holy city in the eyes of chroniclers, visitors, pilgrims, and prophets from the days of Abraham to the beginnings of modern times* (Princeton, 1995), 223.

Sermon of Nicholas the Patriarch (d. 925), on the capture of Thessalonica in 904

The city of Thessalonica was sacked and captured by the Muslim convert Leo of Tripoli (d.921/2) (Rashiq al-Wardami, Ghulam Zurafa) in 904.

What of the impious invasion at this moment of a mixed rabble of Assyrians and Egyptians, who in their campaign against us (Oh for my miseries!) appear like heroes, instead of the paralyzed and almost skinless weaklings they are, according to the reports of those who know them well? What is the cause of all this, and for what reason are we thus beset by evils? Is it not because in God's eyes we are reckoned equally guilty? Is it not because He scorns us and has relegated us to the side of the rejected and because we have become hated instead of loved ?...

Cities have been depopulated; men slaughtered like sheep; women, wrenched from their spouses by main force, are pitifully exposed to the shameless looks of a licentious foe. Oh that my eyes were fountains of tears to weep over these things and others even more pitiable! Churches have been desecrated; virgins, hallowed for the heavenly bride-chamber, have been carried off to be raped; altars of God have been soiled by the filth of the impure; monks and priests are divided between the sword

and slavery. Alas for the heaviest of my woes: the relics of the saints, after all their struggles, are now mocked and mangled by the profane, and even after death they suffer a second martyrdom.

Where, Martyr Demetrius, is your invincible succor now? How could you allow your city to be sacked? Inaccessible to enemies under your patronage from the time the sun saw it first, how could it experience evils so great? How did you endure and tolerate this?

Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople, Miscellaneous Writings, Greek text and English translation by L. G. Westerink (Washington, DC., 1981), 11, 13.

Mysticus' letter of sympathy to the historian and head of the Armenian church John the Catholicos (d. ca. 925) of Greater Armenia in 913.

Armenia was a Christian country and opportunities were given for friendly relations with the empire especially as Armenians suffered by the Arabs; the influence of the status of the Armenian church often encouraged hopes with reunion with the Byzantine church.

.....I think that your God-loving Lordship is not unaware of the deep sorrow and ceaseless grief of our heart on behalf of the Armenians, the Iberians, and the Albanians, who collectively comprise your faithful flock, upon whom the Ishmaelite Saracen tyrants have inflicted severe travail and afflictions. Although we could not witness with our own eyes the visitation of danger upon your flock, as we are physically beyond range, yet, hearing of the trouble that your land is suffering at the hands of the wicked, we deplore it with deep personal grief and mourn with great sorrow. If those of us, who are at a great distance from you have received these tidings through hearsay with such personal grief, then how much more severely all these must have affected you, who partook of the torments together with your flock and were persecuted as well as clubbed and beaten by the impious and wicked rebels. What could be done that might have been proper and fit?

.....At least, stop the wicked hostilities that prevail among them. Do not let them remain in their wild, beastly nature, whereby they fall upon one another in rage in order to kill. Let them return to human rationality and Christian serenity, wherewith salvation will be granted to the rest of the people in the lands of Armenia, Iberia, and Albania.

My Humility made haste to write to you first and give this brief friendly advice. I sent another letter like this to your Curopalate and to the prince of Abasgia, whom we advised to listen to you, to forget their animosities, to seek friendship, unity, and peaceful coexistence with one another as well as with all the Armenian and Albanian princes, to come together unanimously and fight against the children of the ungodly enemy Aposatai so that you might not all perish and so that the kindred races that are under your sway might not be shaken. Now, your Holiness must try to extirpate the wicked animosities among the princes by talking to them face to face, or by me and of letters and encyclicals, as well as with the help of bishops, priests, and holy men, and see to it that they are not negligent in this. You must encourage them to turn to better things, such as the redemptive mysteries and salutary works. For if you are thus of one accord and unified, the destructive evil will be unable to bring any kind of affliction upon your land...

Only then, both you and we shall grant them remission for their sinful animosity, which they iniquitously allowed to prevail among themselves. And as it befits your Holiness, you may grant each one his rights so that every individual may be reinstated in his former office. Hereafter, let there be the peace of Christ among you, and let your prayers, which shine with holiness, be with our Humility.

Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople, Miscellaneous Writings, Greek text and English translation by L. G. Westerink, ep. 198, 33–5.

The Byzantine historian John Kaminiates (10th c.) describes Leo of Tripoli who captured and pillaged Thessaloniki in 904.

While we were in this situation, the leader of the barbarian forces decided to patrol the entire section of the wall that is washed by the sea. He was a sinister and thoroughly evil person, who flaunted a style of behaviour singularly appropriate to the wild animal after which he was named and for whose ferocious ways and ungovernable temper he was more than a match. Assuredly, you yourself also know the man by reputation, a reputation which celebrates his wickedness with the claim that he has outshone all previous paragons of impiety by descending to such depths of madness as to gaze insatiably upon the spilling of human blood and to love nothing better than the slaughter of Christians. He too was once a Christian, was reborn in the saving grace of baptism and taught the precepts of our religion. But when

he was taken prisoner by the barbarians, he embraced their impiety in exchange for the true piety of the faith and there is no way in which he more eagerly seeks to ingratiate himself with them than by making his deeds conform to his name and by taking a particular pride in flaunting the actions of a felon and a brigand. And so Leo, this untamable beast, this felon, sailed around the wall gazing intently and searching out with studied malice possible point from which to launch his attack.

John Kaminiates: the capture of Thessaloniki, ed./tr. D. Frendo, A. Fotiou, G. Bohlig (Perth, 2000), ch. 24.

www.deremilitari.org

Panegyric to al-Mu ‘taṣim on the conquest of Amorion

Poetry is used in Arabic sources to praise the caliphs for waging jihad against the Byzantines, their chief enemy in the battlefield. This notion is exemplified in the following verses of Abū Tammām (d. 845), who praises al-Mu ‘taṣim for his conquest of the celebrated city of Amorion, and similar examples can be found in the verses of al-Buṭturī (d. 897), al-Mutannabī (d. 955), Abū Firās (d. 968) and Ibn Hāni (d. 973).

Conquest of conquests that is beyond

What poets’ measured verse could ever encompass

Or orators’ unbound prose!

A conquest for which the sky’s gates opened

And the earth appeared decked out

In new attire

O battle-Day of ‘Ammūriyyah!

Desires went forth from you yielding milk

Abundant, honeyed.

You left the fortune of the Banū al-Islām ascendent

And in decline the fortune of idolaters

And their abode....

When Theophilus beheld war with his own eyes,

And the word was is taken

From plunder,

He tried with money to divert war's course,
But the sea, its currents and billowing waves,
Overwhelmed him.
Far from it! The steady earthly shook beneath his feet,
From the attack of a reckoner, not a seeker
Of gain,
Who had not dissipated gold that numbered
More than pebbles so that he was
In need of gold.
For the lions, the lions of the thicket,
Aspire to the plundered on the day of battle,
Not to plunder.

L. 11-4; L. 50-4; Tr. Stetkevych, *AbūTammām and the Poetics of the 'Abbāsīd Age*, 189, 193-4.

Exchange of Prisoners

A notice from Theophanes

The first exchange of Arab-Byzantine prisoners (al fidā') took place in the year 769 and is reported only by the Byzantine chronicler Theophanes the Confessor's ninth-century account.

In this year an exchange of prisoners took place in Syria, a man for a man and a woman for a woman and a child likewise for a child.

Theoph., AM 6261, AD 768/9, 444; C.Mango-R. Scott, tr./ed., *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284-813* (Oxford, 1997), 613.

The Ransoming of Treachery

The exchange of 905 was supervised by the military commander Rustam b. Baradu al-Farghani; it was interrupted after 1,154 or 1,155 Muslim prisoners had been exchanged because the Byzantines went back on the agreed terms. So it was known as "ransom of treachery" (al fidā' al-ghadr). The exchange was resumed in 908 and it was known as "ransom of completion" (fidā' al-tamām).

The exchange of prisoners known as the ‘Ransoming of Treachery’ took place in the month of Dhu al-Qa ‘da 292 AH/905 AD at Lamiis. A certain number of Greeks and Muslims had already been brought back, when the Greeks violated the treaty. The final exchange took place between the Greeks and the Muslims in the same town of Lamiis in the month of Shawwal 295 AH/908 AD under the direction of Rustam, the military governor of the Syrian frontiers, who presided over both transactions. The number of Muslims delivered up on the occasion presided over by Ibn Tughan in 283 AH/896 AD, which we have already mentioned, was as high as 2,495 prisoners of both sexes. In the ‘Ransoming of Treachery’, 1,154 Muslims were handed over and another 2,842 in the final exchange.

Mas ‘ūdī, VIII, 224; tr. *The Meadows of Gold*, 373.

The process for the exchange of 845

Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh said: We were ransomed on the Day of the ‘Āshūrā’, on the Lamos River at Seleucia, near the sea. The number of ransomed captives came to 4,460. There were 800 women, with their husbands and children, and more than one hundred Dhimmīs of the Muslims. The exchange took place on a one-to-one basis, whether young or old. Khāqān endeavoured to evacuate all the Muslims that could be located in Byzantine territory.

Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh continued: When they were assembled for the exchange, the Muslims stood on the east side of the river, the Byzantines on the west side. The river was fordable. Each party would send forth a man, and the two would meet in the middle of the river. When a Muslim reached the Muslims, he and they would exclaim, ‘‘God is the greatest’’. And when a Byzantine reached the Byzantines, they said something in their language equivalent to ‘‘God is the greatest’.

It is reported on the authority of al-Sindī, mawlā of ‘usayn al-Khādim: The Muslims and Byzantines built bridges over the river. We would send a Byzantine over our bridge, and the Byzantines would send a Muslim over their bridge. The one would come to us and the other to them. He denied that the river was fordable...

He said [Muḥammad b. Karīm]: The Byzantines were disturbed by the number of Muslims, as they were few and the Muslims many, but Khāqān reassured them in this regard. He established a truce of

forty days between the Byzantines and the Muslims, during which time the Byzantines would not be raided, so that they could reach their territory and place of safety. The exchange went on for four days. A large number of Byzantine captives remained with Khāqān, whom the Commander of the Faithful had designated for ransoming the Muslims. Khāqān turned over to the Byzantine ruler one hundred persons of those who remained with him. Thus, the Byzantines would be in arrears owing to the difference, thereby assuring an exchange for the Muslims who might be captured before the ransom period expired. He returned the rest to Tarsus, where he sold them.

Al-ḥabarī, 1355–6; The History of al-ḥabarī, Incipient decline. The caliphates of al-Wāthiq, al-Mutawakkil and al-Mustanṣir A.D. 841–863/A.H. 227–248, vol. xxxiv, trans. and annotated by J. L. Kraemer (Albany, N.Y., 1989), 42–3.

On Christianised Muslims exchanged in 845

Muḥammad b. Karīm said: About thirty ransomed Muslims who had converted to Christianity in Byzantine territory departed with us. When the forty-day period of truce between Khāqān and the Byzantines elapsed, Aḥmad b. Sa‘īd b. Salm b. Qutaybah undertook a winter raid....

The History of al-ḥabarī, Incipient decline. The caliphates of al-Wāthiq, al-Mutawakkil and al-Mustanṣir A.D. 841–863/A.H. 227–248, vol. xxxiv, 43.

On the state of Muslim prisoners

The maltreatment of Muslim prisoners of war in the empire was often taken as a cause for war. Their misfortunes are vividly described in a poem drawn from the ‘the ‘Life of al-Ma’mūn’ for the ‘Abbasid period. The poem reminds us of the embassy of the wazīr ‘Alī b. ‘Isa (d. 946) to the empire to enquire about the condition of Muslim prisoners and the refutation of the allegation of their maltreatment by the patriarch Nicholas Mysticus (d. 925) in his letter to the caliph al-Muqtadir (d. 932) in 922.

It is indicated in the ‘Life of al-Ma’mūn’ that he [al-Ma’mūn] sent a messenger to the Byzantine king. So when he had come to him, had delivered the letters which were with him, and had stayed for some days, he asked him [the king] for permission to go to the captives. So he granted [this] to him. Thus, he went to them, and asked them about their well-being and so they informed him about this. Then, when

he wished to depart from them, a man from Baghdad came up to him and recited verses [of poetry]. He also asked him [the messenger] to recite these to al-Ma'mûn.

And these are the verses:

We went out of this world and so we are not counted among its people.

And we are neither among the living nor the dead.

Does anyone mourn for those who dwell in the Byzantine land in the miserable condition of captivity?

As they know nothing but their captivity, hardship and affliction?

A secure castle with a guard who does not rest when all eyes rest keeps all news from them.

If the prison-master comes one day for any reason, then we rejoice and say: someone from this world has come.

And we rejoice in a dream and so all our talk when we rise in the morning is talk about the dream.

So if it [the dream] was good it will not come again quickly, and it will be slow, and if it was bad it will come very quickly.

So when the messenger arrived at al-Ma'mûn's court and thus recited the verses to him, he [al-Ma'mûn] became sad and cried. Then he conquered it [the fortress] and rescued them. And after that, he conquered great cities and secured castles in the Byzantine land and took possession of high fortresses, and returned from the Byzantine land to his country.

Diplomacy in the early Islamic world. A tenth-century treatise on Arab-Byzantine relations. The book of Messengers of kings (Kitāb rusul al-mulūk) of Ibn al-Farrā' (London, 2015), 100-1.

Exchanges of gifts

One of the Byzantine emperors sent a gift to al-Ma'mûn bi-Allāh. Al-Ma'mûn said, 'Send him a gift a hundred times greater than his, so that he realizes the glory of Islam and the grace that Allah bestowed on us through it.' This was done. When the gift was ready, he said, 'What do they value most?' They

answered, 'Musk (*misk*) and sable (*sammūr*).' Al- Ma'mūn said, 'Send them additionally two hundred rats of musk and two hundred sable pelts (*jild sammūr*).

Gh. Hijjawi Qaddumi, *Book of gifts and rarities. (Kitāb al-hadīyah wa al-tuḥaf)* (Cambridge, 1996), 77.

Ceremonial in the City

The emperor's victorious return from campaigns against the Arabs

Muslim prisoners took part in ninth and tenth-century triumphal ceremonial associated with victories over the Arabs in the Hippodrome of Constantinople. These ceremonies were usually encouraged by the military and aimed to strengthen notions of unity and support among people.

When the emperor Theophilos returned from the war against the Cilician Saracens who campaigned against him, his entry into the Imperial city was as follows: when he had arrived at Hiereia, the Augusta along with the emperor's representative, the magistros, the Eparch of the City, and all the senate in the City, came out, leaving the officers of the tagmata to guard the City. The senate met the emperor at a short distance from his reaching the palace and, falling to the ground, they paid him homage. The Augusta met him within the railing of the low Triklinion when he had dismounted from his horse and, paying homage, she kissed him. The emperor ordered that the senate should accompany him in conformity with the order of a formal procession to the Hiereia, and remain seven days, until the fettered Hagarene prisoners-of-war should arrive. He ordered that the wives of the senators, having left the City, should proceed thither with the Augusta.

After the seventh day he sailed thence and came to St. Mamas, where he spent three days, with the senate; and from there he sailed to Blachernai, and disembarking from the warship, he mounted his horse and came up along the outer wall as far as the great Golden Gate, and entered the pavilion prepared in advance on the meadow where the hippodrome horses were exercised and teamed up. On the same day, those bringing the prisoners arrived at Chrysoupolis; and embarking them in ships, brought them across to where the emperor was waiting. The Eparch of the City had prepared the City in advance, adorning it like a bridal canopy with various skaramaggia and hangings, silver candelabra, and variegated flowers and roses, from the Golden Gate to the Chalke. The soldiers of the different units

took their own prisoners separately and in order, along with the booty and weapons, and proceeded triumphally through the City.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions, CFHB, Introduction, Edition, Translation and Commentary, J. Haldon (Wien, 1990), 147–8.

Social interaction:

The following extract deals with the issues governing Muslim relations with non-Muslims in the ‘Abbasid period especially the legal status of a Muslim who marries a scriptuary, the legality of eating animals slaughtered by the scriptuaries. the status of an unborn child by a Muslim and a scriptuary when his mother gets captured by the enemy, or the status of the marriage between a Christian and a Muslim when the man leaves his wife in the dār al-‘arb (territory of war).

904. I asked: What would you think if a Muslim entered the territory of war under an *amān* and becomes married to a scriptuary woman from among the inhabitants of that territory?

905. He replied: I should disapprove his doing so.

906. I asked: But if he married, would such a marriage be valid?

907. He replied; Yes.

908. I asked: Then, why did you disapprove of that?

909. He replied: Because I disapprove of his living in it.

910. I asked: Do you disapprove of [eating] animals slaughtered by the People of the Book (scripturaries)?

911. He replied: It is all right to do so if they are People of the Book. For God, the Most High, made lawful the animals slaughtered by the People of the Book. It has been related to us that [the caliph] ‘Alī b. Abī ḥālib was once asked about marriage with scripturaries of the territory of war, and he disapproved of it; but when asked about animals slaughtered by them, he saw nothing wrong [in eating them].

912. I asked; Do you hold, then, that if [the inhabitants of the territory of war] are not scripturaries, it is not lawfully [for a Muslim] to eat animals slaughtered by them and to marry their women?

913. He replied; Yes, it is not lawful for him to do so.

914. I asked; If he purchased a slave woman of their religion, would it be lawful for him to have intercourse with her?

915. He replied: No.

916. I asked: If he took her back with him to the *dar al-Islam* and she was nubile but young and had not yet known anything [of her religion] and had not declared her admission to it, could he have intercourse with her?

917. He replied: Yes, if he so wishes.

918. I asked: Should he perform the [funeral] prayer, if she were to die?

919. He replied: Yes.

920. I asked: Would an animal slaughtered by her be lawful to eat?

921. He replied: Yes.

922. I asked: If a Muslim married a scriptuary woman from among the inhabitants of the territory of war and she bore him a child, but the Muslims captured her and her child when she was pregnant, what do you think would be the status of her, her child, and her unborn child?

923. He replied; Her children would be regarded as free Muslims and nothing would be done against them, but the woman and her unborn child would become fay' because the unborn child possesses the same status as its mother.

924. I asked: What would you think if a man entered the *dār al-Islam* as a Muslim, leaving his Christian wife behind in the *dār al-_{arb}*?

925. He replied: Her wedlock would be dissolved [from the moment] he entered the *dār al-Islam*.

926. I asked: Would his divorce of her, or his *ila'*, or his *zihār* not be effective on her?

927. He replied: No....

M. Khadduri, *The Islamic law of nations. Shaybani's Siyar* (Baltimore, 1966), 187–8, 189.

When a *musta'min* (the beneficiary of *aman*) from the territory of war [enters the territory of Islam] and buys a slave

648. I asked: If a *musta'min* from among the inhabitants of the territory of war enters the territory of Islam under an *amān* to trade and purchases a Muslim slave and thereafter returns with the slave to the territory of war, what would the status of the slave be?

649. He replied: He would be free from the moment [his master] entered with him into the territory of war.

650. I asked: Why?

651. He replied: Because [the slave] is a Muslim purchased in the territory of Islam. Do you not think that if the slave killed his master, took his property, and returned to the territory of Islam, everything that he had taken from his master, whether property or slaves, would be regarded as belonging to him and he would be a freedman and nothing would be held against him.

652. I asked: Would it be lawful for this slave to kill his master?

653. He replied: Yes....

654. I asked: Would you not think that the sale contract [by virtue of which the unbeliever owned the Muslim slave] created a [state of] security (*amān*) between them?

655. He replied; No. This is Abū 'anīfa's opinion. However, Abū Yūsuf and Muḥammad [b. al-Hasan] held that the slave would not become free [immediately after his entry into the territory of war] until the Muslims had taken him back by capture or he had returned to the territory of Islam against his master's will. Only in one of these two ways would the slave become free.

656. I asked: If a slave who had accompanied his master to the territory of war became a Muslim and thereafter the slave was either purchased from his master by a Muslim or was captured by some Muslims in a raid [on the territory of war], do you think that he would remain in a state of slavery and become *fay'*, subject to division [as spoil]?

657. He replied: No. I hold that, if his case were as you stated, he would be free and nothing would be held against him.

If a man from the *dār al-ʿarb* entered the *dār al-Islam* without an *amān* and were captured by a man [from the *dār al-Islam*], he would become a slave of that man, subject to the one-fifth [rule]; but if he

had become a Muslim before being captured, he would be free and nothing would be held against him.

This is the opinion of of Abū Yūsuf and Muḥammad [b. al-Ṣasan]...

Khadduri, *The Islamic law of nations*, 160–1, 162.

Cultural interaction

Greek Translation movement

This account refers to the introduction of a Greek translation phenomenon under the auspices of the caliph Maṣṣūr (d. 775) and reflects the broader Caliphal-Byzantine rivalry for the appropriation of the claim as heirs of the ancients. The movement reached its climax under the caliph al- Ma'mūn.

He was the first caliph to have books translated from foreign languages into Arabic, among them *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and *Sindhind*. There were also translated for him books by Aristotle on logic and other subjects, the *Almagest* by Ptolemy, the *Arithmetic* [by Nicomachus of Gerasa], the book by Euclid [on geometry], and other ancient books from classical Greek, Byzantine Greek, Pahlavi [Middle Persian], Neopersian, and Syriac. These [translated books] were published among the people, who examined them and devoted themselves to knowing them.

Al-Afḥārī in D. Gutas, *Greek thought, Arabic culture: the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad and early 'Abbasid society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (London and New York 1998), 30.

The first among the Arabs who cultivated the sciences was the second caliph, Abū Ḥafḥ al-Manṣūr. He was—God have mercy on him—deeply attached to them and to their practitioners, being himself proficient in religious knowledge and playing a pioneering role in [promoting] philosophical knowledge and especially astrology.

Then the caliphate devolved upon the seventh 'Abbasid caliph, al-Ma'mūn — the son of Ḥārūn al-Raṣīd, the son of al-Mahdī, the son of al-Manṣūr— who completed what his forefather al-Manṣūr had started. [There follows a long eulogy of the accomplishments of al-Ma'mūn and his promotion of all sciences, Greek and non-Greek alike.] As a result, the 'Abbasid state almost rivalled the Byzantine empire in its heyday and period of greatest unity.

Ḥafḥ al-Andalusī, in Gutas, 94.

ʿĪnāy b. Ishaq (809–73), an influential Arab Nestorian Christian polymath, was a prominent translator of books of philosophy and classical Greek and Persian texts into Arabic and Syriac.

At this time ʿĪnāy, the son of Issac, an excellent physician, became known. His father was a pharmacist from the city of ʿĪrtā. ʿĪnāy greatly desired to learn medicine, and he went to Baghdād and began to read the Collection (i.e. Epitome) of Alexander on John, the physician, the son of Māsāwīyāh. And one day in answering John back, John became angry, and drove him away, and said to him, ‘What connection is there between thee and medicine? It would be far better for a man of thy sort to be selling beans by the wayside, ‘And the young man ʿĪnāy was sad, and he went out weeping. And he went to the country of the Rhômāyê, and he lived there until he had learned the writing and literature of the Greeks accurately. And he was able to translate books from Greek into Syriac, and from Syriac into the Saracenic tongue [i.e. Arabic]. And he went back to Baghdad in the garb of a Greek, and he went to Gabriel, the chief of the physicians, the son of Bôkht-îshô ‘. And when Gabriel had tested ʿĪnāy’s knowledge, he honoured him greatly, and he named him ‘Rabban ʿĪnāy’. ...Twenty five books of ʿĪnāy are extant, besides those which he translated from Greek into Syriac and Arabic...

The Chronography of Gregory Abu’l Faraj, the son of Aaron, the Hebrew physician, commonly known as Bar Hebraeus, tr. E. A. Wallis Budge (London, Oxford, 1932), 147–8.

The caliph al-Ma’mūn introduces a Byzantine prisoner with a knowledge of geometry to his scholars.

This account is one of many instances of a common Caliphal-Byzantine interest in the pursuit of knowledge and exchange of ideas. One recalls the important Byzantine envoys who were sent to the Caliphal court, famous for their Hellenic culture, such as Leo Choirosphaktes (d. 919) or John Mysticus (10th c.)— the latter was praised by the Arab historian al-Mas’ūdī (d. 956) for his knowledge of classical philosophy. Also, Constantine/Cyril (d. 869) during his embassy to Baghdad, asserted to the caliph that in the fields of arts and sciences the Arabs are ‘only pupils of the Romans’. These accounts show how Byzantine envoys sought to outshine their opponents in the intellectual sphere and corroborates the fact that they ‘had to reckon with wise men, versed in letters knowing geometry astronomy and other disciplines’.

...While they were in confusion and asked him to explain and teach (the basics of Euclidean geometry), how this for this reason and this for that, the said name and form, their minds became opened and they understood his words, and they were taken by amazement asking how many scientists Byzantium nourishes. As he said that there were many and placed himself among the group of students and not the teachers, they then asked about his teacher, if he was still to be counted among the living and flourished above the earth. He then said that he is above the earth and expounded his virtue, saying that he led a life of no material possessions and unknown to many shone through wisdom.

Continuation of Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838), 187–8.

The caliph al-Ma'mūn asks the emperor for Leo the Mathematician or Philosopher (d. after 869)

The caliph al-Ma'mūn sent a letter to the emperor Theophilos requesting the services of Leo offering to the emperor two thousand pounds of gold and a perpetual truce.

Because the divine authority that has been laid to me and the great number of people that is subjected to my hand and power do not permit this, I demand that you send the one famous man, whom you have in philosophy and other sciences for a short time, and persuade him to come near to me to transmit with his teaching his science and virtue as I am so passionate to want them. In any case let there be no delay on the grounds that I am not of those who speak the same language and I am of foreign faith. But I rather demand that the petition will be received as from good friends and honest. For this reason there will be given to him twenty kentenaria and peace and truce both eternal and not to be brought to an end.

Cont. Theoph., 190.

Caliphs and emperors ally with rebels and apostates of the opposite side

In 821 caliph al-Ma'mūn supported the movement of Thomas the Slav (d. 823) and allowed him to be crowned emperor in Antioch in order to put pressure to emperor Michael II (d. 829)

At this time a civil war broke out in the east and filled the world with all manner of evils, reducing from many to few the number of men: fathers took up arms against their sons, brothers against those born of the same womb, and finally friends against those who loved them the most. Their leader was Thomas, about whom diverse reports circulated...

According to the first and only report, which I trust, in as much as we have assurance from certain written sources, this Thomas was born of humble and poor parents who, moreover, were descended from the Slavs who are often intermingled in the East. Faced, then, with a life of poverty, he ventured his luck and, running off from his country, introduced himself into this great city. And attaching himself as servant and assistant to a certain person of consular rank, he hastened through his intemperance to dishonour and insult his master's bed and marriage. Being caught in the act and unable to bear the great shame and scourgings on this account, he fled to the descendants of Hagar and, giving them sufficient assurance both through his successive deeds over many years –for it was about the twenty-fifth year he passed- and the fact that he renounced Christ our God, he became leader of a certain military division and took up arms against the Christians, promising with the greatest force to bring the empire of the Romans under their control.

...for straightway invading the Saracens' country by return march he appeared to them invincible; and entering into barbarian dialogues he concluded a treaty of peace and invited them into an alliance, conceding and promising that which has already been mentioned, that he would betray the Roman territories and put control of them in their hands. Whereupon he was not unsuccessful in his purpose, but received the crown and was proclaimed emperor by Job who then held the see of Antioch; and he gathered, or rather took hold of, a great force in order to strengthen himself: there were not only Hagarenes, our neighbours on the borders, but also those dwelling further, Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Assyrians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Iberians, Zechnians, Kabeirans and all those who followed the doctrines and decrees of Manes.

Chronographiae quae Theophanes Continuati nomine fertur libri I-IV, eds. J. M. Featherstone, J. Signes-Codoner (Berlin, 2015), tr. 77, 79, 83.

***D*iplomatic exchanges**

Byzantine embassies between emperors/caliphs

The Byzantine embassy to the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd

In 806 the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd undertook the celebrated campaign against the Byzantine city of Herakleia as a reaction to the emperor Nikephoros' offensive in 805. The account is described in many sources Arabic, Byzantine and Syriac; the ninth-century Byzantine chronicle of Theophanes, which is the earliest, similar to

the Muslim historian al-Tabarī's (d. 923), describes Hārūn's large scale campaign, and both agree that the negotiations resulted in the signing of a truce, payment of tribute, and poll tax (al-kharaj wa al-jizya) on behalf of the emperor and his son. The 806 truce is presented as the result of direct negotiations between the Byzantine religious authorities and Hārūn. Like the empress Irene (d. 803) before, in 797 and 798, Nikephoros used clerics as messengers to Hārūn: his despatch of the metropolitan of Synada, the abbot of Goulaion and the steward of Amastris implies that, in the ninth-century, clerics were the leading personalities in the cities, and aspired to invoke feelings of respect and reverence towards the Arabs.

In the same year Aaron, the leader of the Arabs, invaded the Roman country with a great force composed of Maurophoroi, Syrians, Palestinians, and Libyans, in all 300,000. Having come to Tyana, he built a house of his blasphemy. He captured after a siege the fort of Herakles, which was very strong, as well as Thebasa, Malakopea, Sideropalos, and Andrasos. He sent a raiding contingent of 60,000 which penetrated as far as Ancyra and withdrew after reconnoitring it. Seized by fright and perplexity, the emperor Nikephoros set out also in a state of despair, exhibiting the courage that comes from misfortune. After winning many trophies, he sent to Aaron the metropolitan of Synada, Peter, abbot of Goulaion, and Gregory, oikonomos of Amastris, to ask for peace. After lengthy negotiations they concluded peace on the terms that a tribute of 30,000 nomismata would be paid to the Arabs each year and a capitation tax of 3 nomismata on behalf of the emperor and another 3 on behalf of his son. On accepting these terms, Aaron was pleased and overjoyed, more than he would have been had he received ten thousand talents, because he had subjugated the Roman Empire.

Theoph. AM 6298, AD 805/6, 482; Engl. Tran., Mango–Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 661-2.

Failure of negotiation

The caliph al-Mu'tasim assumes a central diplomatic role in the conduct of negotiations with the Byzantine emperor Theophilos. His rejection of the emperor's requests for peace manifested the 'Abbasid military superiority in the military field and legitimised the caliph's religious authority at home. The following account derives from the tenth-century Byzantine historian Genesios, who mentions that Theophilos dispatched envoys to the caliph to negotiate the release of the captives of Amorion after the sack of the city in 838. Theophilos is reported to have requested the release of his relatives among the generals, responsible for the defense of the city, and also those allies of the empire participating in its defense and all those great men who were under his

service, offering 200 kentenaria and 100 nomismata. However, al-Mu‘taşim is reported to have expelled these envoys and mocked the emperor saying that he had spent more than 1000 kentenaria (100,000 pounds of gold) on the expedition to Amorion.

But why should I want to lament the fall of the city, as Jeremiah, Baruch, and Zachariah lamented the misfortunes of Jerusalem? I should keep my silence lest I magnify the disaster. The emperor straight-away sent ambassadors to the caliph to bargain for the return of all the prisoners, whom he had not removed earlier from the city, despite the advice to that effect of many. For he was mostly concerned with those commanders who were related to him, with whom he had strengthened the defenses of the city, but also with his allies, and indeed all the grandees that supported his regime. He offered two hundred *kentenaria* and one hundred *nomismata* in exchange for their release. But the caliph refused the offer, saying that the maintenance of his army on this expedition had cost him only a little less than a thousand *kentenaria*.

Joseph Genesius, *Iosephi Genesii regum libri quattuor*, ed. A. Lesmueller– Werner and H. Thurn (Berlin, 1978) [CFHB 14], 3.12; Engl. trans. A. Kaldellis, *On the reigns of the emperors* (Canberra, 1998), 60-1

An embassy requesting the ransoming of prisoners

Ibn al-Farrā’ refers to an event of the Byzantine embassy, (unmentioned in other sources) which probably took place in 841 in Baghdad and was related to the request for ransoming the Byzantine prisoners taken captive -including officers, patricians and high-ranking officials-- after the sack of the city of Amorion by the caliph al-Mu ‘taşim) in 838.

It is recounted in the ‘Life of al-Mu‘taşim’ that the Byzantine emperor Basil sent to him a messenger, writing to him: ‘From Basil, son of So-and-So’– until he reached the third, or fourth of his ancestors [who were all] kings – ‘to his brother al-Mu‘taşim’:

‘Indeed, kings still carry out raids against one another, and overcome one another. Also sometimes they are betrayed by bad ministers. And what happened to us in Zapetra, I have realised what was the cause of the mistake in it. And you have dealt double to me because of what you did in Amorium. I beg you through the blessed earth from which you come to do me a favour and release my patricians. For there are one hundred and fifty patricians. I will also ransom each one of them with one hundred Muslims. And before us kings have exchanged gifts. I have sent you together with my messenger forty garments

of silk embroidered with gold. The length of each garment is forty cubits and the width is twenty'. And he mentioned all that he had sent to him as gifts and their description. He sent this [letter] along with a patrician, a servant and a group of people with them. So when they arrived Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik [al-Zayyāt] took the letters and he tried to be informed of their content and he gave them back sealed and said: 'The Commander of the Faithful has no time for these'. So those presents were not bestowed for six months. Then he allowed the messenger to enter the caliph's presence. So when al-Mu'taṣim saw him he said: 'We think we harmed you because of your long stay'. He [the messenger] said: 'On the contrary, the longer stay has imposed obligations to me. And we always hear from our wise men that delaying the messenger is a sign of success. As a consequence, a stay which has brought me close to you and which made me witness God's blessings in your presence has not harmed me'. Thus, al-Mu'taṣim admired the messenger's statement that was translated for him, and accepted his presents.

Vaiou, tr. *Diplomacy in the early Islamic world*, 88-9

Byzantine ceremonial in the Arab embassy to Constantinople of 860

The participation of Arab envoys and the testimony of courtly rituals in the following account reflects the imperial concept of order through the observance of ceremonial, embedded in symbols, which came to life by the presence of the mighty emperor as representative of God on earth and supreme ruler. Muslim envoys and prisoners were either simple observants of ceremonial or participants themselves being assigned rituals such as wearing special clothes, and shoes during festivities at court. By attracting them into the orbit of Byzantine civilization the emperors aimed to impress them and convey to them the splendour of the empire and its power. The following account of the reception derives from the embassy of Naṣr b. al-Azhar to Constantinople in 860 or 861 to negotiate an exchange of prisoners.

The king was on a platform, the patricians were standing around him. I saluted him and was seated at the edge of the great platform. I displayed the gifts before him. The emperor had an interpreter in front of him, a slave.... The emperor accepted my gifts and my offer of a reciprocal oath. The maternal uncle of the king, who was responsible for the affairs of the empire, took the oath instead of Michael. I said: 'O King, I have received the oath of your uncle. Does this promise bind you?' He nodded with his head

in the affirmative. I did not hear him speak a word from my first appearance in Byzantine territory until I left. Only the interpreter spoke, the emperor moving his head to signify yes or no. He never spoke.

Al-ḥabarī, *Tertia series*, iii, 1450-51; Tr. N. el-Cheikh, *Byzantium viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 160.

The Byzantine embassy to Baghdad in 917

In 917 the Byzantine empress Zoe, attempted to deal with the Bulgars, who since 894 under the leadership of tsar Symeon I (d. 927) had embarked on a series of campaigns against the Empire. In the process she sent an embassy to Baghdad for the signing of a truce and an exchange of prisoners; this was intended to secure the eastern frontier. The embassy of 917 receives much attention in Arabic sources and information is also corroborated by Byzantine and Syriac sources. The embassy took place in a period of political decline in the caliphate and served to legitimise 'Abbasid authority at home and abroad.

This year Baghdad was visited by two envoys from the Byzantine emperor, who had come by the Euphrates route, bringing splendid presents and numerous marks of friendship, and soliciting a truce. Their entry was on Muharram 2 (June 25, 917), and they were housed in the palace of Sa'id b. Makhlad. Ibn al-Furat gave orders that this residence should be specially furnished and provided with all utensils, &c., which they could require, and that they and their retinue should be literally provided with supplies, including animals for food and sweets. They solicited an audience of Muqtadir for the purpose of delivering the letter which they had brought; they were told that this was a matter of great difficulty, only possible after an interview with his vizier, informing him of their design, arranging the matter with him, and requesting him to facilitate the granting of the audience and to advise the caliph to accord their petition. Abu Umar Adi b. Abd al-Baqi, who had escorted them from the frontier requested Abu'l Hasan Ibn al-Furat to permit them to visit him and he promised them an interview on a day which he named. The vizier gave orders that the soldiers should line the streets the whole way from the palace of Sa'id to the palace which he (the vizier) occupied in Mukharrim, and that his own retainers and troops with the vice-chamberlains posted in his palace should form a line from a doorway of the palace to the reception-room. A vast saloon with gilt roof in the wing of the palace called the Garden Wing was splendidly furnished and hung with curtains resembling carpets; on fresh furniture, carpets and curtains a sum of 30,000 dinars was expended. No mode of beautifying the palace or increasing the magnificence

of the occasion was neglected. The vizier himself sat on a splendid praying-carpet, with a lofty throne behind him, with serving-men in front and behind, to the right and to the left, while the saloon was filled with military and civil officials; the two envoys were then introduced having witnessed on their way such troops and crowds as might well fill them with awe.

When they had entered the public apartments, they were told to sit down in the veranda, the apartment being filled with troops; they were then taken down a long passage behind this veranda, which brought them to the quadrangle of the Garden, whence they took a turning which led them to the room in which the vizier was seated. The magnificence of the room and of its furniture and the crowd of attendants formed an impressive spectacle. They were accompanied by Abu Umar Ibn Abd al-Baqi as interpreter, and there was present Nizar b. Mohammed, prefect of police, with his whole force. They were made to stand before the vizier Abu'l Hasan b. al-Furat, whom they saluted, their words being interpreted by the person mentioned; and the vizier made a reply which was also interpreted by him. They preferred a request for the redemption of the captives, and solicited the vizier's services in obtaining the assent of Muqtadir to this. He informed them that he would have to interview the caliph on the subject, and would then have to act according to the instructions which he received. They solicited from him an introduction to the caliph, and he promised that he would procure one. They were then discharged, and, led out by the same route as that whereby they had entered, returned to the Palace of Sa'id, the soldiers still lining the road in full dress and perfect equipment. The uniform consisted of royal satin tunics, with close-fitting caps over which were satin hoods pointed at the top.

Ibn al-Furat then applied to Muqtadir for leave to introduce the envoys and instructed him in the answer which he was to give them; he then commanded all the officials, civil and military, and all ranks of the army to ride in the direction of the imperial Palace, and to line the streets on horseback from the palace of Sa'id thither. These orders were carried out and the cavalry stationed themselves as directed in full dress and complete armour. The vizier further ordered that the open courts, the vestibules and the passages of the Palace should be filled with armed men, and that the whole castle should be furnished magnificently. After finishing these preparations and seeing that every detail was carried out he bade the envoys present themselves. They rode to the palace and were greatly impressed by the spectacle through which they passed; the numbers of soldiers, their splendid uniforms and their perfect

equipment. When they reached the palace they were taken into a corridor which led into one of the quadrangles, thence they returned into another corridor which led to a quadrangle wider than the first, and the chamberlains kept conducting them through corridors and quadrangles until they were weary with tramping and bewildered. These corridors and quadrangles were all crowded with retainers and servants. Finally they approached the saloon in which Muqtadir was to be found, where the officers of state were standing according to the different ranks, while Muqtadir was seated on his imperial throne, with Abu'l Hssan Ibn al-Furat standing near him, and Mu'nis the eunuch with the officers next in order to him stationed on his right and left. When they entered the saloon they kissed the ground and stationed themselves where they were told by Nasr the Chamberlain to stand; they then delivered their master's missive, proposing a redemption of captives, and preferred a request for its favourable acceptance. The vizier replied for the caliph that he accepted the proposal out of compassion for the Moslems and the desire to set them free, and out of his zeal to obey God and deliver them...When the envoys left the imperial presence they were presented with poplin cloaks adorned with gold and turbans of the same material, and similar honours were bestowed on the interpreter Abu Umar, who rode home with them, while the troops remained drawn up as before for the ransoming to take place. Mu'nis at once made arrangements for this; the Byzantine captives, on whose account the envoys had come, were purchased when the envoys desired to purchase them, while Mu'nis and the officers who were to travel with him received 170,000 dinars from the Baghdad treasury for their undertaking. Mu'nis wrote to the governors of the lands through which he was to pass, bidding them furnish what he should require. To each of the envoys a private present of 20,000 dirhems was given; they then left Baghdad with Mu'nis accompanied by Abu Umar. The redemption was carried through this same year under the supervision of Mu'nis.

Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajarib al-umam*, ed. and tr. H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth, *The eclipse of the Abbasid caliphate*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1920–1), 56-60.

Exchanges of letters

The following accounts stress the prevalent attitude in Muslim sources towards the empire that it was a hostile power for Islam and the option was to convert or subordinate. Emperors are described as treacherous for breaking truces, are equated with unbelievers and the emperor Nikephoros (802-11) is addressed as 'son of an infidel mother', an expression which occurs frequently in epistles which criticise emperors.

After he took power of the Byzantine empire, Nicephorus the Byzantine emperor, wrote to Hārûn al-Rashîd : ‘From *Niqfûr*, king of the Byzantines to Hārûn, ruler of the Arabs. Now then, the Queen who was before me placed you in the position of a rook and placed herself in the position of a pawn. So she gave you from her the money what was in reality the money you should have given her, but <this was due to the> weakness and stupidity of women. Therefore if you read my letter, send back what you took from her money and save yourself the trouble of your money being confiscated. Otherwise there is nothing but the sword between you and me’.

So when al-Rashîd read the letter he became infuriated that none could look at him, still less address him. Likewise the *wazîr* was confused as to whether to offer him any advice or leave him to make up his own mind. Then Hārûn asked for ink and wrote:

‘In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

From Hārûn al-Rashîd to Nicephorus, the king of the Byzantines: O son of a whore I have read your letter. And you will see my reply, rather than hear it; and farewell’.

Vaiou, tr. *Diplomacy in the early Islamic world*. Ibn al-Farrî’s *Messengers of Kings*, 94

Basil son of Leo, emperor of the Byzantines, wrote to al-Mu’taṣim, Commander of the Faithful, denigrating him and threatening and intimidating him. Then he ordered for his reply. So everybody made an extended copy for him and dealt exhaustively with its content. It was recommended to him that in his letter he should refute his [the emperor’s] claim to him and falsify what he had said to him. So when the copies were read to him he found them long. And he said: ‘Write to him what I am dictating to him.’ This was as follows:

‘In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Now then, I have read your letter and I understood your words, and my reply will be what you will see, not what you will hear. The infidel will know who will bear the consequences.’

Vaiou, tr. *Diplomacy in the early Islamic world*. Ibn al-Farrî’s *Messengers of Kings*, 96

Theophilus’s letter to al-Ma’mûn requesting peace

In this year, the ruler of Byzantium, Theophilus, wrote to al-Ma'mūn asking for peace. He put his own name first in his letter, and al-F.s. I the vizier of Theophilus brought the letter, seeking peace and offering a tribute [literally; a ransom]. The actual text of Theophilus's letter to al-Ma'mūn was as follows:

It seems more sensible that the two opposing sides should come together over their respective shares [of good fortune] than adopt courses injurious to themselves. You are not the sort of person who would relinquish such a share which you possess for yourself in favor of a share which might pass to another person. You already know this well enough without my having to tell you. I have written to you inviting you to make a peace agreement and as one desirous of the advantage of a truce in military operations, so that you may remove the burdens of war from upon us and so that we may be to each other friends and a band of associates, in addition to the accruing of benefits and widened scope for trading through commercial outlets, the release of those who have been carried off into captivity and the security of the highways and heartlands of the realms. If you reject this [peace offer], I shall not bamboozle you [=creep up on you secretly in an ambush], nor shall I speak to you in an ingratiating, misleading manner; but I shall penetrate into the innermost recesses of your land, take over against you its barriers and scatter its cavalry and infantry alike. And if I do this, it will only be after setting forth a valid excuse [for adopting this course of action] and after setting up between us the standard of decisive argument. Farewell!

Al-ḥabarī, iii, 1109-10; *The History of al-ḥabarī, The Reunification of The Abbasid Caliphate*, trans. and annotated by C. E. Bosworth, vol. xxxii, (Albany, 1987), 195.

Al-Ma'mūn's uncompromising letter to Theophilus in 832

The religious aspect of al-Ma'mūn's role is evident in his reply to the Byzantine emperor Theophilus's letter in 832. The terminology al-Ma'mūn uses is close to the mihna letters, and manifests the caliph's religious authority as God's deputy on earth who exerted himself for God and acted justly in obedience to God by caring for His religion and servants. Also al-Ma'mūn in his letter to Theophilus in 832 is portrayed as defender of Islam by projecting his image as a fighter who would wage jihad to avenge Theophilus's insulting words unless Theophilus paid tribute (jizya) and became dhimmi (protected). Further, al-Ma'mūn accuses Theophilus of being deprived from insight and deep reflection to see God as he does. Contrary to al-Ma'mūn's aim to carry out the expedition with God's guidance with a divine reward for those who would sacrifice their lives in God's

path, the emperor's offers had to do with worldly benefits, to pay him back the expenses for his expedition, to restore the Muslim cities and give back the prisoners. Hence, the caliph's jihad aimed not only to avenge the Byzantines, but to continue until justice and moral order in the Muslim community was established.

There has reached me your letter, in which you ask for a truce in the fighting and call for the making of a mutual peace treaty. In your letter also, you mingle soft words with harsh ones in that you are seeking to achieve conciliation [with me] in regard to the opening –up of commercial outlets, the achieving of advantageous dealings, the release of captives and the cessation of killing and fighting. If it were not that what I am working towards involves proceedings with deliberation and seizing a favourable opportunity through turning things over in the mind, and were it not that I do not formulate any opinion [ra'y] on a future contingency except on a basis of an informed opinion taking into account the welfare of the community [istiḥṣān] as to what I prefer in regard to its outcome, I should make the answer to your letter [the dispatch of] cavalry horses bearing steadfast, courageous and keen-sighted riders, who would contend with you over your destruction [thuklikum], to seek God's favor by spilling your blood and to make light, as a means of obtaining nearness to God, of the suffering which they will have endured from your military might. Then I should provide them with reinforcements and send them a sufficiency of material and military equipment. They are more eager to go forward to the watering-places of death than you are to preserve yourselves from the fearful threat of their onslaught upon you. They have the promised of one of the two best things: a speedy victory or a glorious return [to God as martyrs in battle.] But I consider that I should proffer you a warning, with which God establishes clearly for you the decisive proof [of Islam], involving the summoning of you and your supporters to knowledge of the divine unity and the divine law of the religion of the ʿanīfs. If you refuse [to accept this offer], then you can hand over tribute [literally; a ransom] which will entail the obligation of protection [dhimmah] and make incumbent a respite [from further warfare]. But if you choose not to make that [payment or ransom], then you will clearly experience face-to-face our [martial] qualities to an extent which will make any effort [on my part] of eloquent speaking and an exhaustive attempt at description superfluous. Peace be upon him who follows the divine guidance!

al-ḥabarī, 1110-1; The History of al-ḥabarī, The Reunification of The Abbasid Caliphate, trans. and annotated by C. E. Bosworth, vol. xxxii, 196-7.

Byzantine-Muslim Friendship

The letter of Nicholas Mystikos to the caliph al-Muqtadir

The following account is part of a letter addressed by the patriarch Nicholas Mystikos to the 'Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (908-29, 929-932) condemning the attacks of the Arab Admiral and renegade Damian (Damiana, Dimyana) against the people of Cyprus. The letter is related to the official embassy of the Cypriot bishop Demetrianos (d. 911-3) to Baghdad to protest against the capture of Cypriots by Damian in 911 and request their liberation. Despite differences, the notion of two lordships or empires in the world as is attested in the letter, corresponds to a high level of communication and understanding between the two peoples. It would be not far-fetched to understand this in terms of the idea of togetherness which features in popular tales, ḥadīth, and apocalyptic traditions, according to which the two kingdoms of Baghdad and Constantinople both united in religion and blood relations will rule a newly kingdom. Like other letters exchanged between high officials or emperors and caliphs, practical needs may have accounted for a more compromised tone.

All power and all earthly authority depend, O friend, on the authority and power of Him who is on high: there is no power among men, no sovereign who has obtained sovereignty on earth through his own intelligence, unless He who has power in the Heavens, who governs and is the sole sovereign, has conceded it to him... What is the significance of these words for us? It is that two empires, that of the Saracens and that of the Romans, together hold the entirety of power on earth, have pre-eminence and shine like two great torches in the celestial firmament. For this reason alone, it is necessary that we have relations of community and fraternity, and that we absolutely avoid- under the pretext that we differ in our way of life, our customs and our religion – maintaining hostile dispositions toward one another; and that we not deny ourselves the ability to communicate by letter, unless we should be able actually to meet.

Mystikos, Migne, *PG*, CXI, 27-40; Tr. M. Bonner (ed.), *Arab-Byzantine relations in early Islamic times* (Oxon, NY, 2017), .xxi-xxii.

Religious Intolerance and attacks on churches and monasteries

Theophanes on harsh measures imposed by the caliph al-Manṣūr on Christians

In this year Abdelas intensified the taxation of Christians, so much so that he laid taxes on all monks, solitaries, and stylites who led lives pleasing to God. He also put under seals the treasuries of churches and brought Jews to sell their contents and these were bought by freedmen.

Theoph., AM 6249 AD 756/7, 430; Engl. Tran., C. Mango–R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 595.

Destruction of monasteries and churches

Thereupon [after the outbreak of the civil war] the inhabitants of Syria, Egypt, and Libya divided up into different states and upset public affairs and each other. They were ruined by murders, robberies, and every kind of misdeed toward both themselves and the Christians under them. It was then that the churches in the holy City of Christ our God were laid waste, as were the monasteries of The two great groups of eremitic monks (Khariton and Kyriakos), That of St. Saba, and the remaining cenobitic communities of Sts. Euthymios and Theodosios. This slaughter, directed against each other and us, continued through five years of anarchy.

Theoph., 484; Turtledove, 165.

Fines imposed on churches

It came to pass in those days that a certain heavy fine was imposed by the impious Hagarenes on the holy church of the Resurrection of Christ our God, and on the other churches which were in holy Jerusalem, to the extent that those who lived in the holy city of Christ our God were unable to pay this monetary fine.

The Life of Michael the Synkellos, ed./tr. M. Cunningham (Belfast 1992), 37.

Payment of poll-tax

Annual expenses of the patriarch:

630 gold solidi among the priests, deacons, monks, clergy and the whole congregation of the church.

540 solidi [for the servants].

300 solidi for church material.

140 solidi for the [churches in the city].

580 solidi paid to the Saracens.

[...solidi] for Saracen servants

Commemoratorium de casis Dei (ca 808)=J. Wilkinson, trans., 'Commemoratorium (or Memorandum) on the churches of Jerusalem', in Wilkinson, *Pilgrims before the Crusades*, (Warminster, 1977), 135-138,

Al-Mutawakkil's (d. 861) measures against the Christians

He prescribed for all the countries that the Christians should put on the dress of the vagrant, patches on their outer garments, a patch on the front and a patch on the back; and that they should be forbidden to ride on horses, that balls be put on their saddles, that they ride with wooden stirrups, that images of satans (in one copy, of pigs and apes) be put on the doors of their dwellings. From this the Christians acquired sore trouble, grief and affliction.

Eutychos, trans. S. Griffith, 'Euty chius of Alexandria on the emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium: a tenth century moment in Christian apologetics in Arabic', *B* (1982), 52, 154-90, 165; repr. in his *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine* (Aldershot, 1992), no IV.

Tolerance

On the festival of Holy Fire and scepticism over its miraculous origin

On Holy Saturday the ceremony of the descent of the Holy Fire is celebrated among the Greek Orthodox Christians in the church of Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Although the Holy Fire in other Christian churches was made by striking a flint in this church up until now it is believed that it descends from Heaven to the centre of Christ's tomb. The ceremony was in use at least up to the crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099; the ceremony caused the admiration and fear of Muslims whose presence in common prayers with Christians is stressed in sources throughout this period.

On the fifth day of the Syrian month Tishrîn I (October), is the festival of the Kanîsah al-Kumâmah (the Church of the Sepulchre) at Jerusalem. The Christians assemble for this festival from out all lands. For on it the fire from heaven doth descend among them, and they kindle therefrom the candles. The Muslims also are wont to assemble in great crowds to see the sight of the festival. It is the custom at this time to pluck olive-trees. The Christians hold many legends there anent; but the fire is produced by a clever artifice, which is kept a great secret'.

Al-Mas'ūdî., iii, 405; trans. G .Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems: a description of Syria and the Holy Land from AD 650 to 1500* (2010), 203.

Description of churches in the city in late ninth century

Among the churches inside the city there are four that are particularly notable, and their walls adjoin each other. One is on the east, and inside it are Mount Calvary and the place where the Lord's Cross was found; this one is called the Basilica of Constantine. There is another one to the south and a third on the west, and in the center of this latter is the Lord's Sepulcher. Around the Sepulcher are nine columns and the walls between them are made of the very best stone... It is not necessary to write a great deal about this Sepulcher because Bede says quite enough about it in his history.

These churches [around the Sepulcher] have between them an unroofed court, with its walls ablaze with gold and a paved floor of the most precious stone. From each of the four churches runs a chain, and the point where the four chains join in the center of this garden is said to be the center of the world.

Moreover, in this city there is another church to the south, on Mount Sion, called St. Simeon's, where the Lord washed the feet of his disciples, and in this the Lord's crown of thorns hangs. This is the church where we are told St. Mary died. Nearby on the east is the church in honor of St. Stephen, where he is said to have been stoned. And further east is the church in honor of blessed Peter, on the spot where he denied the Lord. To the north is the Temple of Solomon, which contains a Saracen synagogue.

Bernard, *Itinerary*, 11-; tr. Peters, *Jerusalem*, 221.

Conversions

Arabophone Christians forfeit their faith by becoming acculturated to Islamic society

In the second half of the ninth century many Christian conversions to Islam took place in Iraq, Syria and Egypt. The author of the Summa condemns the Christians who were willing to forfeit their faith as hypocrites echoing Islamic vocabulary.

They hide their faith, and they divulge to them [i.e., the Muslims]

what suits them... They stray off the road which leads its people

to the kingdom of heaven, in flight from testifying to

the doctrine of the Trinity of the unity of God and His incarnation,

because of what strangers say in reproach to them... [They are]

the hypocrites among us, marked with our mark,

standing in our congregations, contradicting our faith, forfeiters of themselves, who are Christians in name only.

S. Griffith, 'The first Christian *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic: Christian *Kalām* in ninth century Palestine', in M. Gervers and R. J. Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and continuity: indigenous Christian communities in Islamic lands, eighth to eighteenth centuries* (Toronto, 1990), 15-31, 19.

Martyrdom

The following text of a martyrology or martyrdom story of the Sixty martyrs of Gaza (d. 638) who were Byzantine soldiers who were executed by Amrus ('Amr b. al-As) for their refusal to convert to Islam after the Muslim conquest of the town. The martyrology despite its issues of reliability expresses realities of the early conversions to Islam, which intensified in the 'Abbasid period, and aims to serve as a role model of anti-Muslim resistance and propaganda. Like other accounts of martyrdom, this account display the topoi of war between Christians and infidels, the capture of the faithful, the pressure to convert, their steadfastness to the true faith and their martyrdom.

It happened at that time regarding the godless Saracens that they besieged the Christ-beloved city of Gaza and, driven by necessity, the citizens sought a treaty. This was done. The Saracens indeed gave to them a pledge, except to the soldiers who were captured in that city. Rather, marching into the city and seizing the most Christian soldiers, they put them in prison. On the next day 'Amr ordered the Christ-holy soldiers to be presented. Once brought before him, he constrained them to desist from the confession of Christ and from the precious and life-giving cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since they would not consent, 'Amr ordered their wives, children and weapons to be separated from them, and again to put them in prison...

Passion of the Sixty Martyrs of Gaza, 301; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it. A survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), 348.

The passion of Anthony Rawh (d. 799)

The story of the conversion of Anthony Rawh is an example of a Muslim apostate to Christianity. Being a Muslim by birth, Anthony was a 'true apostate' according to the Muslim jurists like Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796) and al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) and the punishment for apostasy was death. His Martyrdom was composed by an anonymous Melkite and his Life is found in Arabic and has been translated in Ethiopic, Georgian and Latin.

The story of Saint Anthony, who suffered martyrdom in the city of Raqqa in the days of Hārūn al-Rashīd

In the days of Harun al-Rashid, there was a certain man, a nobleman and an Arab, by the name of Rawh. He lived in the city of Damascus, in a place called al-Nayrab, which is outside the Bab al-Hadid, in a monastery there, in which there was a church dedicated to the name of the blessed martyr Theodore.

This young man from Quraysh was disrespectful to the church and used often to steal and eat the holy oblation and drink such blood of our Lord Christ as remained in the chalice. Sometimes, too, he used to pull the crosses from their places and shamelessly rip up the altar cloth. Many times, too, he used to mock the priest and the other people attending the liturgy.

The residence of this man from Quraysh overlooked the church, and he used to watch all that the flock of Christ did there on Sunday, including the procession of the sacred gifts. He used to sit there, devoting himself to drink and dissolution, while the children of baptism were devoting themselves to their liturgy and their prayers.

One Sunday, the priest finished the liturgy, lowered the curtain before the altar, locked the church's door, and then left. This young man from Quraysh peered out through his window at the western end of the church and saw a picture of Saint Theodore at the eastern end of the church. The saint was astride a gray horse and was carrying a lance in his hand. Beneath him there was a picture of a great dragon, whose head the saint had shattered with the butt of his spear.

Immediately, the young man rose to his feet and took up his bow. He fitted an arrow, took aim at the picture of the martyr, and shot. The arrow reached to within a foot of the picture of the saint, or perhaps less. Then, by the power of God-may his name be exalted! V-the arrow turned around and returned, all the way to the left hand of Rawh of Quraysh-and it struck his palm, penetrating it entirely.

On seeing what had happened, the young man was terrified and cried out...

That night, while everyone was asleep, this young man from Quraysh kept vigil, pondering what he had witnessed that day. Then suddenly, with the crowing of the cock, the blessed martyr Saint Theodore came to him, armed with his weapons and riding on his horse.

He addressed the young man loudly, 'You have hurt me by what you have done: you mocked my temple, you shot my icon, you ate the body of Christ my Lord, you tore up the cloth of my altar, you held the

servants of my church in contempt. Abandon, now, this attitude of yours and believe in the Lord Christ. Forgo your tyranny and accept life and victory-through this demonstration [of God's power]...

Entering into the presence of the holy and blessed Abba Elias [=Elias II, 770-97], the patriarch, he told him what he had seen, how the martyr came to him, and what he had been told by him.

On hearing his story, the patriarch gave thanks to Christ and said, 'My son, the mysteries of Christ are great, and He reveals them to whom He wishes. Is there anything you want, my son?'

The young man replied, 'I have want you to baptize me'.

The patriarch answered, 'I cannot do this, for fear of the authorities. Instead, you should go to the river Jordan, with the [other] men [here]. The Lord Christ shall provide you someone to baptize you in private.'

The young man listened to what he had to say, and after receiving his blessing, he immediately departed for the Jordan...

At last he reached the river Jordan, the place where the Lord Christ was baptized. There he found two monks from the monastery of Saint John, who were living the life of itinerants. This young man of Quraysh hastened to them and fell at their feet and asked them to baptize him in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They agreed to his request...

He asked them to tonsure him a monk, which they did, saying, 'From this day forward, you shall be called Anthony.' They then clothed him in the holy schema and sent him on his way in the peace of Christ.

The blessed Anthony departed and returned to Damascus, to his own neighbourhood and to the people of his house-now dressed as a monk.

When the people of his neighbourhood saw him, they were astounded and said, 'What is that you've done to yourself? What is this habit and these woolen clothes we see you wearing?'

He replied, 'I am a Christian, a believer in my Lord Christ. What business is that of yours and what do you want from me?'

Rawh meets the qadi and suffers punishment

After conversing with him and debating with him for some hours, when they found that they could not shake him from his holy faith, they began to drag him through Damascus, market by market, until they reached the qadi.

On seeing him and how he was followed by a huge crowd of Muslims and non-Muslims, the qadi said to him. 'Alas for you, Rawh! Why have you abandoned the religion in which you were born and your honourable lineage, so as to become a Christian?'

The blessed man replied, 'These are trivial matters when it comes to the good pleasure of my Lord Jesus Christ. You should thus give whatever orders you wish'.

After hearing his reply, the qadi ordered him to be beaten. He then threw him into prison. He stayed in a Damascus prison for the next seven months. After that, he was transferred to a dark building, known as the Dungeon, in which there were bandits, Ethiopians, and thieves-men guilty of crimes other than murder. He stayed with these men for seventeen days and seventeen nights and was subjected to punishment.

On the eighteenth night, a light suddenly shone on him and illuminated the place where he was, as well as the whole prison. He then heard a voice saying, 'Fear not, Anthony, you are among the elect: I have prepared felicity and a crown for you, together with the martyrs and all the saints.'

Rawh was taken to the governor of al-Raqqa

Those with him in prison saw this light and informed the guards, and the guards went and informed the qadi. When the qadi heard about this wonder, he ordered that Anthony be removed from the Dungeon and imprisoned with the men of Quraysh and the other Arabs. As for his fellow Arabs there, they kept annoying him with arguments and quarrels and were maligning him for adhering to the Christian faith. Yet Christ the Savior aided him and inspired him with proofs to use against them.

One night, just before dawn, he saw two elders dressed in white. One had a chandelier full of lamps, and it burned with neither water nor oil. The other had a crown, which he took and placed on Anthony's head.

When dawn came, the saint was full of joy at what he had seen, when suddenly messengers from the qadi arrived. They entered and arranged for his release from the prison where he was being held. They

then conveyed him to the city of Aleppo, making use of the barid-post. From there he was taken down the Euphrates, as far as Raqqa. He was then turned over to the governor of the city, a man called Harthama, who imprisoned him and put him in bonds.

Rawh's martyrdom

When news of this reached the caliph al-Rashid, he commanded that Anthony be released from prison and set free from his fetters and that he be brought to him.

When he arrived in al-Rashid's presence and stood before him, the caliph said to him, 'You unfortunate man, Rawh, what has induced you to do this to yourself, to cast away your noble status and put on these clothes? If you need money, I'll give it to you and elevate your status and show you more favors. Abandon these thoughts of yours and cease letting yourself be led astray.

The blessed Anthony answered him, 'In truth, I haven't been led astray, but guided, and I've come to believe in the Lord Christ, who came into the world to enlighten and save all who seek him and strive for His good pleasure. I am today a Christian, one who believes in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'

After hearing his answer, al-Rashid commanded that he be beheaded.

The saint said, 'In truth, you have fulfilled my request, and your command today, has caused me to attain what I desire- and this, because I have sinned against my Lord three times and I do not think that my sins can be erased unless I am beheaded.'

Al-Rashid then asked him, 'And what are these three misdeeds?'

The saint answered him, 'First, many times, while still a Muslim, I prayed in Mecca, at the Bayt al-Haram. And truly, as is indicated by its name, God has declared it forbidden for those who believe in Christ. Secondly, I slaughtered and sacrificed on the Day of Immolation (*yawm al-adha*). Thirdly, I participated in razzias against Byzantine territory and killed persons who believed in Christ. And now, it is my hope that through my beheading God will erase sins from me and will baptize me in my own blood.

When al-Rashid had heard him say these words and had come to understand his disposition, he had him beheaded-a believer in the Lord Christ. They then gibbeted him on the shore of the Euphrates.

Elias of Helioupolis (d. 779) is brought by slander to the Muslim jurist in Damascus and he is pressed to denounce his faith

The following martyrology refers to the trials of Elias of Damascus, a Syrian Christian, who after being wrongly accused that he had apostatized to Islam he was brought in front of the local governor who induced him to convert but Elias refused and was put to death. The Life, an eleventh-century composition, was written in Greek at a time when Arabic was becoming increasingly the main language in the communities of Syria-Palestine aiming probably to show that Greek was still an important part of the community's culture.

Dragging the saint by the hand he brought him before a certain Leithi [al-Layth ibn Sa'd ibn Abd al-Rahman] by name, with the young man [son of the deceased Arab patron] supporting his testimony that events had occurred thus. The eparch questioned the saint if those things said about him were true. He replied, "In no way, may it never be that I would renounce the faith in which I was born. But I confess Christ and venerate him as being the God of heaven and earth and sea." The eparch said, "Let it be conceded that you had never renounced [your faith], but because you were presented [before the court], we encourage you to apostatize and come to the religion of the Arabs, and you will enjoy every honor from us." The saint responded, "May it never be that I would do such a thing. For I am a Christian, descended from Christian ancestors, and I am ready to die for my faith." The eparch said, "As the witnesses have brought charges against you, I accept the testimony against you and insist that you renounce [Christianity] because it is not at all possible to permit those who once and for all have accepted our religion [to return to their former faith]." The saint replied, "You are the judge and may accept however you like my accusers, but I tell you more fervently that I am a Christian and I will deliver my body to you (if it is necessary), so as to show that my faith is not forced but voluntary."

...Thusting him away from the ruler's presence, he [Leithi] took him to a place called Prasina¹, and he commanded him to stand naked before the tribunal until, he said, he thought further about him.

Then, since his [Elias'] constitution was not able to withstand the icy cold suffering, and as already after the violence of nakedness he was led away to prison again in the same manner as before, and there

¹ Possibly the Umayyad palace al-Khadra which was used as a prison by the 'Abbasids.

having no comfort or warmth, there the saint suffered in turn and a great affliction overcame him as part of his martyrdom. His belly was chilled by the cold and became ill with dysentery and the great endurance of the saint was seen in all things. ...Carrying him as if he were dead they tossed him upon any beast of burden they could per chance get hold of, took him to the courthouse and threw him down as though he were a loathsome unburied corpse, and none of the faithful dared approach him. And then the very same prison guards, returning the saint back to prison again, abandoned him to be submerged into the very same misery.

S. McGrath, 'Elias of Heliopolis. The life of an eight-century Syrian saint', in J. W. Nesbitt, ed., *Byzantine authors. Literary activities and preoccupations* (Leiden, 2003), 85-107, 97, 101-2.

Religious interaction: Disputations, dialogue, polemics

A Christian Melkite justification of the veneration of the cross in prayer

Issues of Christology, the Prophet's prophethood, and scripture, worship of the cross, the description of paradise were among the main points which feature in polemical discussions of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries between the Christians and Muslims.

It is necessary for the believer, when he stands before the cross, to behold it and occupy himself with it (which is the most effective way to concentrate his understanding) and to aspire to his thought toward Christ our Lord as though he were crucified before him, as long as he is in prayer. [That is] because it was through the cross that there came our guidance and our rectitude and the existence of that for which we hope in the hereafter. [It was] in the cross that the friends of God boasted, and in it was their triumph).

Ḥimī ' wujūh al-imān, tran. ch. 23; Swanson, 'The cross of Christ in the earliest Arabic Melkite apologies', in S. K. Samir and J. N. Nielsen, eds, *Christian Arabic apologetics during the Abbasid period (750-1258)* (Leiden, 1994), 141.

A Melkite defense of the Christian practice of prostration before icons

Theodore Abū Qurrah (d. 820) Melkite bishop of Ḥarran defends the Christian practice of prostration to the icons which Muslims objected as idolatrous in the same way as they did with the veneration of the cross.

Abba Yannah, our brother, you who are here with us in Edessa, have informed us that many Christians are abandoning the prostration to the icon of Christ our God. In this compassion, for the sake of our salvation, he made it possible for there to be an icon of him, due to his incarnation from the Holy Spirit

and from the virgin Mary. The same too with the icons of his saints. In the Holy Spirit they were emboldened to enter into the arena to participate with him in his sufferings. By perseverance they enhanced the embellishment of his cross and became leaders of honor for the believers, the memory of whom stirs them to imitate them, and to crowns of victory like theirs.

Anti-Christians, especially ones claiming to have in hand a scripture sent down from God, are reprimanding them for their prostration to these icons, and because of it they are imputing to them the worship of idols, and the transgression of what God commanded in the Torah and the Prophets, and they sneer at them.

You have asked us to compose a tract on the subject. In it we should return the reproach to those who reproach us for something in which there is no reproach. We should bring the hearts of those frightened away from prostration to the holy icons back to the practice of prostration to them, in the orthodox way which our fathers established and approved. They were blessed in the Holy Spirit, who taught them heavenly wisdom, hidden in thick darkness from the minds of the wise men of the world, the best of whose wisdom is simple folly beside the lowest and the least of it.

I praise your solicitude, and I think it is appropriate to comply with your request, not in reliance on myself, that I should be able to set up the leadt goal for anyone of the Christians in his religion, or to protect them when anyone of the outsiders, people of perdition, error and rudeness, moves his tongue for Satan to cause them doubts...

A treatise on the veneration of Holy Icons written in Arabic by Theodore Abū Qurrah Bishop of Harrân (c. 755-c.830 A.D.), translated into English, with introduction and notes by S. H. Griffith (Louvain, 1997), 28-30.

On the cult of Aphrodite

Emperor Constantine VII's (d. 959) polemic tone includes a reference to Muslim worship. He says that the Muslims call God 'allah', 'oua' for the 'and', and call the star of Aphrodite 'Koubar'. So they say 'Alla wa Koubar'. This statement probably attests to a pre-islamic practice: the Byzantines knew of a pre-Islamic invocation of Aphrodite and the Greek 'Koubar' attests to the epithet al-kubrā used for Aphrodite in pre-Islamic period or 'Kubar' echoes the Ka'ba of Mecca referred to by John of Damascus (d. 749) in ch. 100/101 of the De haeresibus introduction to the origin of Islam. The worship of Aphrodite is an accusation of the Arabs presented as idolatrous. The Ishmaelites, as they are called, are 'idolaters and worshippers of the morning star

and Aphrodite whom in fact they called Chabarin their own language, which means ‘great’. Later he uses the point in an apologetic paragraph where he accuses the Muslims of being idolatrous as a counter-argument of the latter accusing Byzantines the same, because of their worship of the cross. He argues that it is they who worship the stone, Ka’ba [Chataba] and kiss it and says that it is the head of Aphrodite whom they adore Chabar. No doubt, although this information was already known, he exercised influence upon the polemic against Islam and the association of Arabs with idolatry. Thus the use of this form, a misreading for the Islamic invocation *Allāhu Akbar* [‘God is very great’], it has been taken as polemic statement against the accusation that the Christians worship two gods.

And they pray, moreover, to the star of Aphrodite, which they call Koubar, and in their supplication cry out: ‘Alla wa Koubar’, that is, God and Aphrodite. For they call God ‘Alla’, and ‘wa’ they use for the conjunction ‘and’, and they call the star ‘Koubar’, and so they say ‘Alla wa Koubar’.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, tr. R. J. H. Jenkins (Budapest, 1949), 79.

Islamic polemic against the cross and Christian images

One of the themes of Christian-Muslim polemics was the Muslim objection to the Christian veneration of the cross and images.

You extol the cross and the image. You kiss them, and you prostrate yourselves to them, even though they are what people have made with their own hands. They neither hear, nor see, nor do harm, nor bring any advantage. The most estimable of them among you are made of gold and silver. Such is what Abraham’s people did with their images and idols.

D. Sourdel, ‘Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d’ époque abbaside contre les chrétiens’, *REI* 34 (1966), 27-33/13-26, 29; tran. Griffith, ‘Eutychius’, 179.

The apology of al-Kindi (c. 820 A.D.)

The following excerpts is from the Arab philosopher al-Kindi’s correspondence with a cousin of the caliph al-Ma’mūn, ‘Abdullah b. Ismail al-Hashimi (d. 205/850) and is an important source on a ninth century Christian-Muslim dialogue on the merits of Christianity and Islam. Al-Hashimi makes an exposition of the history of the Qur’an and the prophetic mission which are refuted by al-Kindi.

And now, God grant it to you, by all the knowledge which I have of your religion, and by all my old

affection for the Truth as God has revealed it, and which I have adopted as my own, I summon you to the true Faith. Paradise is yours; nor need you fear the fires of hell on condition that you worship the one God, Sole, Eternal, neither begetting nor begotten, nor has he any peer, such is the definition He, the most Glorious and Great, has given Himself; nor is He known to any of His creatures but to Himself alone. I summon you to the worship of the one God, as thus defined. Nor do I add, in this, by one jot to what He has said of Himself, whose name is Glorious, exalted in His memorial, lofty, great, without peer. This was the religion of your father and ours, Abraham, God be gracious to him, who also was an orthodox Muslim. Still further I summon you to bear witness, and confess the prophetic rank of my master, the lord of mankind, friend of the Lord of the universe, seal of the prophetic order, Muhammad, son of Abdullah the Hashimite, of Quraysh descent, an Arab of the country and town of Mecca, master of the rod and the pool and the camel who intercedes for us, friend of the Lord of power, companion of Gabriel the faithful spirit. God sent him to preach and teach all men everywhere, "with good guidance and true religion, to enlighten him on all religious matters, however the idolaters may repudiate him." He summoned all men everywhere, East and West, by land and sea, mountain and dale, in mercy and kindness, with good works and kindly dispositions and, in gentleness. Won by his gracious ways, they responded everywhere to his summons, and bore witness that he was the messenger of God, who is Lord of all, to all who accept His teaching. All men confessed and paid him homage when they saw the absolute sincerity of his teaching and the soundness of his cause, the clear and indisputable evidence he furnished in a book inspired of God; the like of which no man or Jinn could produce. "Say, if man or Jinn should conspire to produce such a book as this, they could not, though they stood back to back." (Qur'an 17: 90). Here, surely, is proof enough of his mission. So then he summoned them to the worship of the one sole eternal God, and they embraced his religion and submitted to him. They were not scornful or overbearing, but humbled themselves, confessing him, and seeking light and guidance at his hand. In his name power was given them over those who disputed his claims, and denied his mission in an antagonistic and self-righteous spirit. God gave them power over the nations, and humbled the peoples under their yoke. None were excepted save those who received his doctrine and professed the faith, and testified. These saved their lives and property and families, paying tribute and accepting humiliation. Now, God be gracious to you, this witness was borne by God before the world was made.

Written on His throne are the words: "There is no god but God; Muhammad is His messenger." By God, there is no God but He who is Lord of the throne of Omnipotence.

Extract, from 'The Apology of al-Kindi', tran. A. Tien, in *The early-Christian Muslim dialogue, A collection of documents from the first three Islamic centuries 632-900 A. D.*, Translations and Commentary, ed. N. A. Newman, (Hatfield, 1993), 381-545, 388-9.

Al-Kindi's reply and his summon to the worship of the Christian God

And now having, by the help of God, put my case before you in such a way as must confirm it in your memory and, I trust, demonstrate it to your reason, I summon you to the worship of this one God whom I have thus declared to you; one yet three; three yet one. I do not follow your example, nothing here has been slurred over, nothing is ambiguous, obscure or contrary to reason. And now, as God may give you light, fulfill the solemn pledges which you gave me; apply your reason and your mind, as before God. It is necessary that you understand what I have said, and see what it implies; you must not pervert my meaning. I summon you to the worship of the one God in three persons, perfect in His word and Spirit-one in three; three in one. You must on no account think of him as if He were the third of three. So indeed your master misrepresents us saying: "They are unbelievers who say that God is the third of three; and if they do not cease from what they say, sore punishment will overtake the unbelievers; or will they return to God and seek His pardon? He is merciful and forgiving." (Qur'an 5: 77, 78). So says your master; but, God be gracious to you, I should like to know who they are who teach that God is a third of three. Are they the Christians, or not? You claim some knowledge of the three Christian sects, and indeed they are the most prominent sects. Do you know any who say that God is the third of three? I am sure you do not, unless you mean the sect known as Marcionites, who speak of three substances which they term divine yet distinct, one of which represents justice, the other mercy and the other for an evil principle. But these Marcionites are not Christians, nor are they known by that name. The Christian community, on the other hand, are innocent of this heresy; nay they reject and disown it. They teach the one God in whom is the Word and Spirit, and that without any distinction. Your master himself confessed this. Did he not commend you to the faith of Christ, Lord of the universe and the Savior of mankind, and enjoin it on you, saying: 'O People of the Book, do not go beyond the mark of your religion, say not of God save what is true. Jesus the Messiah, the son of Mary, is a prophet of God and

His Word whom He sent to Mary, from Him is the Spirit, believe in God and the prophets and say not there are three gods. Cease from this that it might be well with you; verily God is one.’’(Qur’an 4: 169) You see how he imposes on you the faith of God as one with the Word and Spirit; and declares that Christ, the Word of God, took flesh and became man. Need we add proof or exposition to this? Then he sets a seal to his own word; saying, ‘Nor must you say there are three gods.’ How can such a thing be imagined of God, the Glorious and great? Cease from it, and then it shall be well with you, as long as you do not follow the lead of that cur, Marcion, an ignorant fellow who says there are three gods. I have expounded to you what is our way of it, and what we mean when we say that in the one God are the Word and Spirit; one yet three. All this I have made abundantly clear to you. God grant you the willing heart and the discrimination that you may profit thereby.

Extract, from ‘The Apology of al-Kindi’, tran. A. Tien, 424-5.

On the Muslim *shahādah*

The Summa Theologiae is a Melkite apologetic work written in Arabic in the early ‘Abbasid period, and shows that Arabic had become the lingua sacra, replacing the use of Greek in the scholarly and ecclesiastical texts of the Melkite community. The author of the text perceives the threat the Arabic language posed to the faith of the Christians for he acknowledges its clarity. In the following text, the author by employing Islamic language he presents the need for clearly stated Christian doctrines in Arabic and in this case the Christian doctrine of God.

By “there is no god but God” they mean a god other than the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. According to what they say, “God neither generates nor is generated [Q. 112:3].” Nor according to what they say, is the Holy Spirit anything other than a creature among creatures. So, their saying “there is no god but God” is the same as what we say in words, but it is different in meaning.

S. Griffith, ‘The first Christian *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic: Christian *Kalām* in ninth century Palestine’, in M. Gervers and R. J. Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and continuity: indigenous Christian communities in Islamic lands, eighth to eighteenth centuries* (Toronto, 1990), 15-31, 20.

Communication-travelling

Lack of contact between the Empire and eastern patriarchates

The Arab conquests caused the breaking off of the relations between the eastern patriarchates and the empire, which had consequences in the succession to the patriarchates and most of the bishoprics but were established in 937-8 as the following account relates.

In 937, at a time of peace between the Byzantines and the Muslims, the patriarch of Constantinople...sent a messenger to the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch asking them to mention his name in their prayers and in their liturgies because that had been cut off since the era of the Umayyads.

Eutychius, *Annales*, II, 49, 87-8; tr. R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic rule: a historical and archaeological assessment* (Princeton, 1993), 105.

Prevention of travel to attend the council of Nicaea in 787

To the eastern patriarchates both she [empress] and the Patriarch sent letters of invitation. Theophanes seems to explain the reason, indirectly: 'because the peace with the Arabs had not yet been dissolved'. A letter to the heads of the Christian communities from the Byzantine Empress alone would have made the Arab authorities suspicious that a political alliance against them was meditated, and thus they would have prevented the Patriarchs from travelling to Constantinople. The signature of the Patriarch as well was an assurance that the content of the letter related to Church matters. However, even that scheme did not appease the Syrian monks who, not wanting to jeopardize the convention of a council in any way, or the participation of representatives from the eastern patriarchates, prevented the messengers from delivering the letters to the Patriarchs themselves, fearing that the Arab rulers would still not allow them to travel to Byzantium.

D. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: sources in eight century iconoclasm* (Toronto, 1986), 36-7.