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## INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

### Arabs and Arabia in Byzantine literary sources: People, places, mentalities

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#### ABSTRACTS



Maria Soteriou, Αραβικά διακοσμήσεις εις τα βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ελλάδος, ΔΧΑΕ 2 (1933), Περίοδος Γ'. *Χαριστήριον Αντωνίου Μπενάκη*, 59, pl. 3 (Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies headpiece detail*, 11th c., BNFR gr. 660, f. 350, <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/deltion/article/view/4894>).



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Cover photo: Detail, Gospel, Constantinople 11th c., Cleveland Museum of Art  
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### Ṭayyi' and Ṭayyenoī in Byzantine sources

During the few centuries preceding the coming of Islam, the tribe of Ṭayyi' was one of the most important Arabic peoples dwelling in the northern regions of the Arabian Peninsula and its neighboring lands in Mesopotamia and the Syrian deserts. Ever since they made their documented appearance in Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* in the first century CE, the Ṭayyenoī kept their place next to the other prominent peoples of northern Arabia and continued to play an important role in the events of the following centuries. This paper seeks to study the references to Ṭayyi' and the Ṭayyenoī in the sources of the Byzantine era. It notes the different terms used by these sources, both externally and internally, in referring to the peoples of northern Arabia and compares them with the writings of early Arab historians, such as Al-Ṭabari and Al-Mas'oudi. It also studies the role of the Ṭayyenoī in the Byzantine and Sassanid's conflicts, owing to their location on their borders. The paper, furthermore, concentrates on the spread of Christianity amongst the Ṭayyenoī starting from the fourth century CE and its impact on their relationship with the two states.

## Aisha Saeed Abu Al-Jadaiyl

King Saud University, KSA

### Byzantine perception of Islam and Muslims from the 7th century to the 12th century

This paper will compare and contrast the image of the Arabs and their characterization from a Byzantine perspective taken from their own sources against pre-Islamic and Islamic sources. The article will compare the characterization of Arabs before and after the rise of Islam in the period 600 AD to 1100 AD from a bias Byzantine point of view. Hence, the article will portray the way Byzantines illustrated a negative image of the Arabs before and after the rise of Islam based on the stereotype image of non-Christian believers. Moreover, the article will highlight the way Byzantines named the Arabs as Saracens and other names, such as Ishmaelite and Hagarids/Hagarenes without distinguishing the status of Arabs before and after the rise of Islam. Essentially, the emphasis was based on the reaction of the Byzantine Christian clergy against the rise of Islam as a religion and in a way to discredit it as part of a Christian sect called Monophysitism or as a derivative of ancient Greek paganism, not thus been accepted as the only Religion. Finally, the paper

will comment on the ways the presentation of Arab Muslims in Byzantine sources changed, which portray their image in the context of a higher state regime, thus reflecting the impact of various factors over time, such as trade, political exchanges, as well as diplomatic relations factors and engineering achievements. We will utilize pre-Islamic and Islamic sources to portray the image of Arabs and Muslims from an opposite perspective and according to their own sources; thereafter, we will analyze the sources after the rise of Islam period and during the first period of the Abased Empire 750 AD to 847 AD, thus pointing to the enormous civilization development and the interaction with the Byzantine culture that vastly changed their perspective of Muslim Arab image and status.

In conclusion, the article will illustrate how Byzantine sources were biased against pre-Islamic Arabs and Muslim Arabs after the rise of Islam due to prevailing stereotypes which discredited the image and status of the Arabs and called them Saracens, or using also other denominations, thus avoiding calling them Muslims or Arabs. It was only during the first Abbasid Empire 750 AD to 847 that Byzantines changed their view towards Muslim Arabs after interacting with them in various aspects of life, such as transactions, diplomatic relations, education, and scientific achievements. Pre-Islamic and Islamic sources are widely used to illustrate the comparison of the image and situation of the Arabs before and after the rise of Islam, helping to highlight their civilized way of life before 600 to 1100 AD and clearly showing the change in the image and the situation that the Byzantines had earlier towards them.

### Vassilios Christides

Institute of Graeco-Oriental and African Studies, Attica, Greece

#### Survey of the Arab-Byzantine cultural relations

As it is well known, the Arab-Byzantine cultural relations have not yet been thoroughly studied. Byzantium and Islam, in spite of their antagonism, shared a common worldview for many centuries and actually we can clearly detect an undercurrent of continuous cultural exchanges.

Of particular interest is the Hellenistic and Byzantine influence on Islamic art and architecture as is it demonstrated in the mosques of Syria and Palestine, especially in the famous mosque of Damascus which was constructed at the time of the caliph Walīd (r. ca 705-715). The external mosaics of this mosque decorated with enormous imaginary trees clearly reveal the Hellenistic influence while the general plan of the mosque belongs to the Byzantine tradition. Gradually, the Arab-Islamic art developed its own designs and decorations. The strict prohibition of the depiction of human figures contributes to the development of

detailed geometrical designs. Simultaneously, there are marvelous calligraphic decorations of a number of fragments from the Koran. The latter inspired many Byzantine artists who did not hesitate to faithfully imitate these decorations in many Byzantine temples. I emphasize that the use of many oriental motifs in Byzantine art cannot be easily explained. Since oriental motifs were used already in antiquity and continued to exist later in the Byzantine period, it is not easy to know which continued the old tradition and which were created in a later period. According to my view, the motif of sphinx, which appears in the church of Gorgoepikoos (11th century) in Athens, was actually transmitted during the Fatimid period (909-1171).

As I believe, in literature the mutual influences between the epic Arab novel “Umar al-Nu‘mān” and “The cycle of Digenes Akrites” are rooted in oral interwoven traditions. I also attempt to emphasize the mutual influences between the Byzantines and the Arabs in nautical technology and moreover I aim to report that the Arabs had also borrowed many elements from China. A lot of studies demonstrating the peaceful intercourses between the two great civilizations have turned attention to this subject.

### Helen Condylis

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

#### Le *Fihrist* et la *Suda*: Comparaison et miroitement entre le grec et l'arabe

La *Souda* (ou *Suda*) et le *Fihrist*, deux œuvres exceptionnelles, sont nées autour du tournant du premier millénaire chrétien dans deux langues différentes, le grec et l'arabe. La *Souda* est un dictionnaire encyclopédique grec, composé de 30.000 entrées environ, par ordre alphabétique. Son auteur présumé prend position de point de vue religieux, il fait la morale contre le polythéisme et contre les hérésies chrétiennes, cela ne l'empêche de montrer son amour et son respect immense pour la littérature grecque antique. Le *Fihrist* est un ouvrage encyclopédique tout aussi précieux, qui donne une grande place au grec; il est organisé en unités du savoir. Ces unités ont à faire avec l'Islam, et l'intérêt pour la langue, la grammaire et le savoir passe par l'optique de la religion. Nous traitons de la description de la langue dans les deux œuvres, nous chercherons de quelle façon la langue et la religion sont en relation dans le *Fihrist* et dans la *Suda*. A partir de fragments tirés des deux livres, nous chercherons l'attitude de chaque auteur devant sa culture et la culture en général. La description de la langue ne témoigne pas seulement de la position de l'auteur de ces textes, mais aussi nous incite à penser au portrait de leur destinataire. Est-il très différent?

### Salvatore Cosentino

University of Bologna, Italy

#### Why, how, and what to trade in the eastern medieval Mediterranean between Byzantium and the Caliphate? (7th-8th century)

Putting ourselves in the shoes of a trader from any Anatolian, Aegean, or Near Eastern coastal settlement in the second half of the seventh century, let us try to ask ourselves: how, why, and what to trade with countries with which we had always traded but which were now subject to a different political regime? Attempting to answer this question will perhaps make it possible to bring into sharper focus — in its institutional and economic premises — the issue of the mobility of people, things and productions in the Aegean and the Near East between the seventh and eighth centuries.

### Koray Durak

Bogazici University, Turkey

#### The economy of Melitene/Malatya and its role in the Byzantine-Islamic trade (7th to 11th centuries)

My aim is to investigate the economic and commercial history of Melitene and its surrounding region as a frontier town between the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic polities in the early Middle Ages. Such an investigation fills a void in the studies on the history of medieval Melitene and Armenia in general, for there has been no study of the economic history of the city. Furthermore, it helps us better understand the mechanisms of Byzantine-Islamic trade through land routes, which has been neglected in comparison to the maritime routes. In this paper, I will describe the economic structure and local products of Melitene and the neighboring regions under Byzantine rule (Cappadocia, Pontos/Lesser Armenia) as well as Greater Armenia. This section includes an examination of the possible and actual export items of these regions in addition to the routes that connected them to Melitene. The presentation ends with an attempt to trace the trajectory of the commercial history of Melitene from the seventh to the eleventh century in the larger context of Byzantine-Islamic trade.

### Nicolas Drocourt

Université de Nantes, France

#### Description of Byzantine diplomacy with the Arabs in Greek chronicles

Thanks to medieval sources, modern scholars have long noted how far diplomacy was active between Byzantium and the Arabs. From Vasiliev's seminal book *Byzance et les Arabes* to modern monographs (notably those of Andreas Kaplony, 1996 or Alexander Beihammer, 2000) or collective works (*Byzantium and the Arab world*, 2013 among others), historians have studied many aspects of this form of encounter between these two worlds and neighbors. While there are sources in different languages, relatively few of them are in Greek. They remain a small minority for example in the meticulous and exhaustive study of Kaplony concerning the relations between Constantinople and Damascus from 639 to 750 (17 out of 75 texts studied, the others mainly in Arabic). Furthermore, testimonies in Greek chronicles remain unequal in length when they mention or describe these contacts. They range from short passages to rare and detailed descriptions. These variations depend upon the interest of an author for this subject, and upon the sources he relies on. The comparison between narrative authors and normative texts (such as the *De cerimoniis*) may give interesting perspectives on this point. Was there a specific way, in these kind of sources, to describe diplomatic contacts with the Arabs – from the men chosen to travel from one world to another for this specific reason, to the treaties, truces or agreements established between the *basileis* and Muslim powers? These are the questions that our paper will develop.

### Hesham M. Hassan

Hellenic American University, Athens, Greece

#### The Byzantine encounter with Muhammad: How the Byzantine writers have interpreted the Prophet (7th-8th century)

The Byzantine perceptions of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, have many faces; much of what was written about him was hostile to the extent that a whole chronicle on Byzantine hostility against Muhammad can be compiled. The Byzantine fear of Muhammad was interpreted as disdain, intimidation, and insult. However, it was an expected response especially between the writers of the seventh century when they tried to explain this new phenomenon i.e. the appearance of Muhammad's Islam on the horizon of the history of *ecouméne*



of that time. If we talk about Byzantine dialogue with Islam, we discern that Muhammad has always been at the center of it. Muhammad occupies a crucial and ambivalent position in the Byzantine imagination from the seventh century till the fall of Constantinople in 1453. However, after extensive research, we will review, for example, among others, (1) Byzantine sources related to the description of the features of Muhammad (Shape, Profile etc.) dating back to the first half of the seventh century AD, (2) the attempt of Byzantine writers to explain the repercussions of the social phenomenon of “sexual revolution” that came to life by Arab Muslims during and after the conquests in Late Antique, on Byzantine communities living amongst Muslims, in order to find out the reasons behind Muslim Arabs’ insatiable fondness for women by analyzing the personality of Muhammad by probing the depth of his temperamental nature in light of the heavenly constellation etc.

### Johannes Koder

University of Vienna, Austrian Academy of Sciences

#### Theophanes the Confessor on Byzantine Arab policy in the 7th century

The 7th century was a period of military unrest. During the 135 years from 582 to 717 Theophanes’ *Chronographia* speaks only in 27 years about wars, civil wars or rebellions. In particular he focusses on the wars against Avars, Slaves and Bulgarians in Southeastern Europe, and against Persians, Chazars and Arabs on the Eastern borders of Byzantium. According to the *Chronographia*, the main problem during this century at the Eastern borders were in fact the relations with the declining Sasanian Empire in the years between 583 and 630, and with the rising religious and political power of Islam and the Arabs since 629.

Regarding the Byzantine-Arab relations Theophanes’ narrative is, not surprisingly, dominated by military events – mainly the Arab conquests since 632, and until 714 nearly without interruptions. Noteworthy are the following observations: Interventions of an Arab navy occur obviously not before 648. – Several times Arab armies are spending the winters on certain places in fortified cities in Byzantine territories in the years 666-671 (This may be also of interest with regard to climatological observations). – Since 651 Armenia often is a bone of contention. – In the years 664/665 and again 667-671 the Byzantines have problems with Slavs (both terms: Σκλαυηνοί, Σκλάβοι), who were transferred to Asia Minor as irregular soldiers, and at the first opportunity deserted to the Arab army. – Finally, the Arab side has major problems with Mardaite groups in Palestine and Lebanon (mentioned 677/678 and again 684/685).

Speaking about non-Christian religions, Theophanes differentiates between the neighboring peoples in the East or Southeast and those, who invaded the Balkan Peninsula from the North: He describes the Persian fire-worship and Islam as ideologically and politically dangerous, whereas no such comments exist with regard to the original tribal religions of the Avars, Slavs or Bulgarians.

Theophanes comments also on religious leaders. When reporting on the first wave of Arab military expansion, which took place almost at the same time as Muhammad’s death, in the year 632, he offers in short a biographical sketch of the prophet and a rather superficial and critical description of the prophet’s doctrine. Noteworthy is his last sentence: „[He taught his subjects ...,] also that men should feel sympathy for one another and help those who are wronged“.

### Nike Koutrakou

Byzantinist, Ph.D Université  
Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France

### Lila Cheikh Lounis

National Center for Research  
in Archaeology, Algeria

#### Beyond Carthage: Byzantines and Arabs meeting the locals in the North African provinces. The Tebessa example

While sixth-century Byzantines arriving in North-western Africa and meeting the locals have their historian in Procopius writing his *Vandal Wars* and their poet in Corippus and his *Iohannis*, the seventh century and the arrival of the Arabs, due, primarily to the lateness of the sources, presents a different picture. Latin sources such as Paul the Deacon’s *Historia Langobardorum* contain only passing references to Africa. Furthermore, the terminology of places and peoples present problems of identification and/or perception: the word Libyans included all people from Cyrenaica to the Atlantic and were Romans in Procopius’ eyes. So, who and what were the Moors (Μαυροῦσιοι) and Africans (Ἀφροί) allies or adversaries of the Byzantines? Corippus mentions some thirty African tribal names difficult to identify. There is scarce evidence concerning these peoples’ settlements, societies and ideology, economy or communication modes. Arab and Syriac historical sources also dating from the late ninth or tenth century or even later) and using previous works and echoing of legendary traditions on the Arab conquests, moreover present a series of problems of transmission and interpretation in conjunction with the politics of their time of writing.

Archaeology may complete the missing pieces, or it can provide useful hints. Visible 6th/7th-century-remains in Northwestern Africa usually belong to defensive and religious architecture, often incorporating inscriptions and other reused spolia. Remnants of water drainage systems and rare civilian architectural remains indicate a type and level of civilian architecture. Byzantine and Arabic texts mention the wealth of African provinces, both

goods and financial amounts often offered as ransom to avoid captivity and destruction of settlements. Their source could be agricultural production and/or trade, but how could it be secured during warfare involving several actors? Can we speak of an African version of “pági murati”? This communication examines the example of Tebessa (in today’s Eastern Algeria), the Byzantine walls of which are still in place and in good state of preservation, as well as attempts to study its countryside, in conjunction with the information in written sources, in order to take a closer look into the defensive structures and the subsistence of the inhabitants and how they contributed to the adaptations to the coming of the Arabs: a game of continuity and change within the broader picture of the events of the time, which went on during the second half of the 7th century and probably continued, at least locally, well into the 8th century CE and beyond.

### **Maria Leontsini**

Institute of Historical Research/NHRF, Athens, Greece

#### **Narrating the Arab Muslim conquest and power: A review of Byzantine historical sources**

Byzantine historical narratives on the Arab Muslim expansion in the East were premised on the later well-founded awareness that the establishment of Islamic authority over the conquered territories was a *fait accompli*. This reality, which distinguishes the pre-Islamic period from the Islamic era, has emerged as the main historical intersection in the way the Arabs were presented in Byzantine literary sources, as pointed out by E. M. Jeffreys (*Arabs in Byzantine Literature*, Washington 1986). In my paper I further draw from this assessment in order to re-investigate its weighty importance for historical narrative. It is noteworthy that the development of the confrontations between Byzantium and the Islamic world prevalent in contemporary religious texts, regardless of its influence in later historical narrative, allowed the exploitation of many sources and the transmission of their information within the new circumstances that followed the Muslim conquest. This is evident in the relevant references found in two major historical works: the *Chronographia* of Theophanes, which mentions the subjugation of the Sassanian empire to the Arabs before their advance on Byzantine territories, and the *Short History* of Nikephoros, which mentions the exodus of the Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula as a political and military action. Both sources, which offer many aspects of the dynamic relations that developed between Byzantium and the Arabs, can now be further investigated through the detailed recording of the relevant data entered in the database of *Byzantine Literary Sources for the History and Civilization of Arabs and Arabia*, a project implemented within the framework of the collaboration between the Institute of Historical Research/NHRF and the The King Abdulaziz Foundation.

### **Dimitrios Letsios**

Ambassador a.h., Athens, Greece

#### **Arabs and Arabia in the Byzantine sources: Hagiographical testimonies**

Coming back to our initial, perhaps reasonable unwillingness to extensively include in this project hagiographical material, I point out here that consequently only a few works of this genre have been selected, on the basis of their impact on the perception of the Arabs. Furthermore, I take this opportunity to stress the essential contribution of Byzantine hagiography for understanding the Arab history and civilization, especially profiting of the work delivered recently by many scholars, some of them participating in this meeting. Likewise, I would stress that Arab history exceeds the chronological framework set for this project and a look on the past was necessary, in order to properly understand the information included in later works, some of them such as Photios’ *Bibliotheca*, being a prominent example of antiquarian selection.

However even works that raise questions as to their perception of the Arabs, such as e.g. the *Life of Saint Theoktiste of Lesbos* or the *Life of Gregory of Decapolis*, included in our selection, can provide relevant information, in some cases supported by other literary works. In addition, earlier hagiographical material, for instance the *Martyrdom of Arethas*, is essential to shed light on the history of ancient Arabia. Similarly, works not taken into account, e.g. the narrations, which transmit the *Martyrion of the Forty-two Martyrs of Amorion* could be useful as well. Needless to point out, that Arabs and Saracens – with the possible exception of the Gassanides, allies of Byzantium against the Persian empire – have been traditionally represented as adversaries, awful and evil, in historiography as well. This image, enforced by religious prejudice, is expected to have a specific representation and expression in Byzantine hagiography. All together, our approach sticks to the basic: Hagiographical information could not be *a priori* dismissed; its critical use is always valuable and could be an essential supplement to accounts and information recorded in other literary sources.

### **Marilia Lykaki**

Postdoctoral Fellow, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

#### **Working in foreign land: Specialized professionals between Byzantine and Arab territories (8th-10th century)**

The relations between Byzantium and the Arabs were largely characterized by rivalry because of the territorial, ideological and religious antagonism.

Nonetheless, their coexistence created new contexts which encouraged the cultural and economic interactions between the two “lordships”. This is proved by the exchange of materials and products and the reciprocal responses at the level of conciliation and communication. Human resources also seemed to be a desired export. However, with the exception of a few cases of an eminent status people, narrative sources pay little attention to the real role of the movement between the Byzantine and Arab territories working in day-to-day occupations such as construction or agriculture. The paper aims to investigate cases of Byzantines with expertise that served as skilled laborers and professionals in Arab lands. Their mobility — voluntary or forced — is essential to the study of Byzantine-Arab relations and to the history of labor and its impact on historical developments.

### **Christos Makrypoulias**

Ph.D. University of Ioannina, Greece

#### **Arabic military terminology in Middle Byzantine texts**

The first decades of the seventh century proved to be a turning point in the history of the Mediterranean. As Byzantium was evolving, entering the middle portion of its long history, the rise of Islam transformed the Middle East and its surrounding regions, creating an empire that was more than a match for the Eastern Roman state. The confrontation between Byzantium and the Caliphate until at least the tenth century was marked both by military confrontation and by cultural exchanges. The aim of this paper is to study a phenomenon that had emerged from the aforementioned dual character of Byzantine-Arab contacts: the appearance of a number of military terms of Arabic etymology in contemporary Byzantine texts. We will begin by providing an overview of Oriental military terminology (including a number of nautical terms) found in Greek works of literature, historiography and military science written between the seventh and the eleventh century, and conclude by reviewing the historical conditions that made this cultural exchange possible. It is our hope that this brief outline will add a small contribution to the study of Arab-Byzantine relations and contacts (peaceful as well as violent) in a period that proved to be the heyday of both powers.

### **Maria Mavroudi**

University of California Berkeley, USA

#### **Byzantine and Arabic philosophy and astronomy in the early Islamic period**

The paper will revisit the presumed lack of Byzantine philosophy and science in the period between the seventh and the ninth centuries. Further, it will explore whether the earliest philosophical and astronomical writings in Arabic owe anything to their contemporary Byzantine intellectual culture, instead of Late Antique texts defrosted from the deep freezer of the Syriac monasteries in Muslim lands.

### **Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala**

University of Cordoba, Spain

#### **Greek echoes in the Arabic ‘first recension’ of the Martyrdom of Arethas and his companions**

The martyrdom suffered by the Christian population of the South Arabian city of Najrân was transmitted in Arabic language thanks to the task of the bilingual Melkite translators. The original text used by the Melkite translators was a Greek text, which was adapted and recensioned in Arabic based on various techniques, strategies and narrative needs. In this article we analyze, through examples from each of the chapters of the Arabic text, the use that the Melkite translators made of the original Greek text and its adaptation into the Arabic version of the so-called ‘first recension’.

### **Tarek M. Muhammad**

Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt

#### **Mecca, Medīna, and their sights in the Byzantine sources, 8th–10th centuries**

It is usual to read about Mecca, Medīna, and their sights in the Arabic and Islamic chronicles as they have a special dignity among the Muslims. However, it will be more interesting to read about them in the chronicles, epics, and

hagiographies of the Byzantines, i.e. the enemy. As for the recent studies about these two holy cities, Irfan Shahid covered generally the history of the Arabs from the 4th to the 6th centuries. On the other hand, E. Jeffreys, V. Christides, A. Savvides, N. Koutrakou, and others dealt with the image of the Arab Muslims in the literary Byzantine sources. But there is still a lack of information to clarify the image of Mecca and Medīna in the Middle Byzantine sources. From the seventh century afterward, the Muslims rapidly conquered the Byzantine possessions in the Orient such as Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Libya, and Africa. This situation harmed the Byzantine economy and declined Byzantine domination of the Mediterranean, too. Therefore, this new political situation formed an important factor in the Byzantine view on Muslims, Islam, and the two holy cities.

The Greek writers such as John of Damascus, Theophanes, Hamartolos, Digenes Akrites, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, and others referred to these two cities and their sights. For example, they show that Medīna (Yathrib) was the center of the Prophet, the holy mosque of Medīna, that of Mecca, the rituals of the Islamic pilgrimage, etc. When they wrote about them, they did many mistakes, or their sources were confused. For instance, they regarded the tomb of Muhammad (PUH) in Mecca, a holy light come from Heaven to light the mosque of Medīna, the visit of Medīna was one of the rituals of Hajj, etc. The purpose of this paper is to show the Byzantine knowledge about Mecca, Medīna, and their sights in light of the Byzantine sources, 8th – 10th centuries, and discussing their authenticity.

**Awad Abdullah b. Nahee**

Najran University, KSA

### **Mecca and Yathrib: Byzantine views on the two cities. The development of concepts until 10th century**

The paper examines the ways the Byzantines perceived the two holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Yathrib (now named Medina) and moreover argues that the Byzantine understanding of Mecca and Yathrib was influenced by the Eastern Christians' intense interest which had begun since early Islamic times, when Muslim armies managed to conquer the lands in which Christian societies were settled. Early Muslim sources may also have contributed to the shaping of the Byzantine imagination of the two holy cities of Islam, through an indirect way, as the paper endeavors to prove. The discussion will begin by evaluating the interest of modern research in studying the historical context of Mecca and Yathrib in the light of Byzantine sources to see what issues have already been debated. It will follow the outlining of the reflections

made by the Eastern Christian authors on the Arabian Peninsula and more particularly on al-Ḥijāz region where Mecca and Yathrib are located. The analysis will focus furthermore on issues referring to religious concepts, the geographical position and the political role of the two holy cities. Throughout this discussion, the paper will investigate pivotal texts composed by John of Damascus, John of Nikiû and Theophilos of Edessa, which will be examined also in the light of works written by equally prominent later writers such as Theophanes the Confessor, Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople and Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos.

**Kosuke Nakada**

Okayama University, Japan

### **Fighting and negotiating with the Arabs: The role of Byzantine military commanders in the 10th and 11th centuries**

The relationship between the Byzantine Empire and the Abbasid Caliphate tends to be described in terms of incessant confrontation and warfare. However, the situation on the frontier was much more complex. We must bear in mind that the pattern of skirmishing in the Cilician frontier remained more or less the same for centuries, and there was little change in the demarcation line until the mid-tenth century. The two great powers in the eastern Mediterranean world did not dare to annihilate each other. As both had multiple frontiers (the Balkan for Byzantium, Central Asian for the Caliphate, etc.), they needed to manage limited resources. As a result, the Anatolian frontier seems to have become a place for compromise. Of course, there were incessant small-scale conflicts conducted by local potentates on both sides of the frontier, with occasional large expeditions led by central authorities, but they were often followed by a peace treaty and ritualized exchange of the prisoners of war. There were efforts to co-exist, at least regarding waging warfare in a 'durable' way. Such a subtle relationship was maintained and adjusted by diplomatic negotiations, in which the role of central governments and the ambassadors they dispatched are often emphasized. However, we must bear in mind that there were also negotiations at a local level. For instance, one can clearly see the negotiations and exchanges among local figures in sources such as the famous epic Digenes Akrites, which is believed to reflect the actual state of affairs in the frontier. By gathering and analyzing evidence of such local-level contacts from a variety of sources, this paper argues that Byzantine local military commanders played a significant role in negotiating with neighboring potentates, as emperors entrusted them with both military



and diplomatic duties for the efficient management of the frontier zone. First, we shall examine military treaties such as the Taktika of Leo VI to see what role the Byzantine emperor and imperial government expected of military commanders on the frontier. To deal promptly with incessant warfare, emperors allowed commanders to deal with small-scale conflict at their own discretion. It is also notable that they were advised how to negotiate with enemies. This indicates that emperors to a certain extent entrusted them with negotiations at their own discretion. Based on this presupposition, second, actual cases of negotiations drawn from narrative sources will be analyzed, revealing that commanders not only acted as agents of the imperial authority, but also built their own networks across the frontier, thus playing a central role as mediators between Byzantium and Muslim potentates. Moreover, such local networks were exploited during the Byzantine expansion after the mid-tenth century, especially when it proceeded through negotiations and treaties.

#### **Johannes Pahlitzsch**

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Germany

#### **The Melkites in Byzantine sources**

Today very often the terms Arab and Muslim are used interchangeably, so that the connection between the Near East or the Arab world and Christianity might be understood by some as a contradiction. However, this certainly does not correspond to the modern conception that Christians in the Near East do have of themselves. The modern meaning of the term Arab has its origin in the pan-Arabic, nationalistic movements of the 19th century and is defined by the linguistic, cultural and historical ties that connect the people in the Arab Near East. In this sense oriental Christians are very much proud to be Arabs. However in the pre-modern period, the term Arab designated something different, namely the tribes from the Arabian Peninsula that were the actual protagonists of the Islamic conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries. In this respect the oriental Christians dissociated themselves from these Arabs of Bedouin background very clearly and maintained their identity as the original indigenous population of the conquered lands, calling themselves in Egypt Copts/qibt which is derived from the Greek *aigyptios* or in Syria because of their original Aramaic language Syrians. Before this background this paper will examine the references in Byzantine sources to the Arabic-speaking Orthodox Christians of Syria and Egypt, the Melkites, to establish how this seemingly peripheral community was perceived by the Byzantines.

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#### **Assimilation of Arab minorities into Byzantine society: Reevaluation in the light of Arabic and Byzantine sources**

In a latest study on Byzantine politics to accommodate the various ethnic elements, A. Kaldellis has suggested that “Byzantium was capable of absorbing groups and individuals whose ancestry was partly or even wholly foreign and treating them as fully Roman” (Kaldellis, *Romanland*, 72). This judgment is of course based on the holistic approach of the various ethnic elements that inhabited Byzantium without distinction between one element and another, or between the official position and society. Kaldellis takes the Khurramites as a ‘textbook case’ to rule that the Byzantines “could absorb thousands of men from a group that was initially so different from the mainstream of its own culture, who initially shared no common traits, whether in ethnicity, language, or religion”. Based on Genesios, he also goes far to assume that these Khurramites “ceased to exist as Khurramites, or ‘Persians’”, and that “If the Persians’ descendants retained any affective memory of their ancestors, they did not express it in ways that reached our sources” (A. Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*, Cambridge Mass., London 2019, 128). In my recent study (‘Arab Apostates in Byzantium: Evidence from Arabic Sources,’ *Byzantina Symmeikta* 29 (2019) 273-314, here 310-312) I suggested, unlike Kaldellis’ approach, that the Khurramites can be used as a ‘textbook case’ to reach a different judgment on the criteria that formed the official positions of the Byzantines towards apostates and the extent to which they could accept the other as ‘Roman’. Kaldellis criticized my approach, stressing that “Abdelaziz Ramadan argues that the Byzantines always remained hostile to the Khurramites, but the evidence that he cites refers to the initial group that entered the empire, not to their descendants three generations later; he does not seem to realize that the argument requires the passage of generations.” (Kaldellis, ‘Byzantine Identity Interrogated, Declared, Activated,’ in: *Identities. Proceedings of the 7th International Symposium “Days of Justinian I”, Skopje, 15-16 November, 2019*, ed. Mitko B. Panov, Skopje 2020, 21-36). Since my study on “Arab apostates” dealt with this general group without devoting to the case of Khurramites, and Kaldellis’s study only dealt with this case in order to make its general judgment, this research proposal aims to discuss the case of Khurramites in the general context of the problem of assimilating the Arab elements into Byzantine society, and in light of the proposal presented by my study and the criticism directed at it by Kaldellis.

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**Abraha and Justinian:  
An attempt to reinterpret manuscript sources through epigraphy**

The policy of Justinian in Arabia is known thanks to two firsthand sources, the *History of the Wars* of Procopius and the account of the ambassador Nonnosos (of which one has only the extracts copied by the patriarch Photios). It has been the subject of numerous analyzes by contemporary researchers who have tried to date the various known embassies, headed by Julien (531), the father of Nonnosos and Nonnosos himself. There is a third source which has been known since the end of the 19th century. It is a ḥimyarite inscription from Yemen which incidentally cites a diplomatic conference bringing together Aksūm (Ethiopia), Rome and Persia. This conference is being held in Yemen in the fall of 547. Researchers who have dealt with Justinian's politics mention this source, but do not include it in their reconstructions because they do not understand its significance. Finally, we must take into account the history of Abraha's reign which is now better known for the period 548-560, thanks to the recent discovery of several ḥimyarite inscriptions. If we try to articulate these various data, it is possible to propose a somewhat different interpretation of the Byzantine embassies sent to the Aksūmites and the Ḥimyarites, which would be spread over a longer period than previously thought. The aim of Justinian's last embassies would have been to reconcile the negus and Abraha (who had seized the throne of Ḥimyar, a tributary of Aksūm, following a coup) and to mobilize these two kingdoms in the war against the Sāsānid Persians. The dismissal of the Arab prince called Qays (in Greek Kaisos) that Justinian had placed at the head of the tribes of central and northern Arabia would meet a requirement of Abraha.

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**Once again about the reforms of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān:  
The question of Arabization and Islamization, a new approach**

Far from the Arab sources, papyri of the 7th and 8th centuries dealing with the Arab rulers of Egypt present a real image about the Coptic society and administration of Egypt and tell us what happened there during the Arab rule of Egypt. The literary Arab sources indicate that the Umayyad Caliph

'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (685-705 AD/65-86 AH), due to his tensioned relations with the Byzantine emperor Justinian II (685-695, 705-711 AD), had Arabized the financial offices (*dawāwīn al-kharāj*) and issued a new Islamic coin. Many historians speak about Arabization of *al-dawāwīn* by 'Abd al-Malik's reforms in Syria (*Bilād al-Shām*), Iraq, and Egypt and they discussed widely the question of *al-danānīr*, too. As for Egypt, papyri offer valuable details about the question of Arabization and Islamization. By the time of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, the formulae of the papyri became Islamic, not Christian as before. He inserted many Islamic and Quranic formulae into the papyri and Coptic textile to refute the Christian faith, i.e. the divinity of Christ. After examination of the Arabo-Byzantine sources and papyri, we think that the question of 'Abd al-Malik's reforms has to be focused again to clarify that his reforms were for Arabization, or Islamization, or both, i.e. the early procedures of Islamization have to be attributed to 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān or to the Mamluks.

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**The Arabs as besiegers: The testimony of Byzantine  
sources about the Arab siege operations on the  
Byzantine-Arab border (8th-9th century)**

The aim of our paper is to study and present the testimony of Byzantine historiographical sources about the siege operations of the Arabs against Byzantine positions. These testimonies will form the basis of a statistical analysis of these operations in order to answer following questions: a) to what extent and number were the siege operations successful, and b) in the case of successful sieges, how were they achieved? Was it sabotaging the walls, creating a rift in the walls using siege engines, climbing the walls, betraying part of the guard or surrendering for fear of starvation? The study of such statistical data can: a) help to determine the nature of siege warfare during the period of the Byzantine-Arab conflicts, b) contribute to identify the main methods of siege warfare, before the period of dominance of the counterweight trebuchet (twelfth century) and c) to assist in exploring the relationship between the military textbooks of the period and their contemporary reality.

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#### Theophanes's *Chronographia* and Muslim sources: Remarks on the accuracy of narratives on events and the use of names and terms

Theophanes worked to cover in detail a large part of the events related to the war conflicts between the Byzantine and the Islamic/Muslim states of the seventh and eighth centuries and tried to support his annalistic narratives with information on people and places that were referring to the Islamic/Muslim side. However, a number of the names and narratives mentioned in Theophanes's *Chronographia* were presented contrary to what was mentioned in the Islamic/Muslim sources; the situation is similar to the events and names that were reported by the Muslim historians regarding the Byzantine state. This was due to confusions that arose from the recording of the names and the chronological classification of the events with an attempt to translate the relevant information from Arabic or vice versa from Byzantine sources. The detection of the perceptions and methods used by both sides reveals an interesting picture of the mentalities on history and geography but also the politics of this era. Furthermore, the venture to correct some of these mistakes and return them to their true originals, whether in their Byzantine source or the Islamic/Muslim original texts made also possible to rearrange the events in accordance with a quite more precise sequence, while the results of this research can also provide some new patterns for the course of conflict and the relations between the Byzantine and Islamic/Muslim states. Overall, this paper reviews some aspects of a number of errors and certain amendments which have led to alterations of the events and offer the possibility to better comprehend the personality of Theophanes, and the importance of his *Chronographia*.

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#### La *Chronique de Théophane*, le *De administrando imperio* et l'*Histoire des Arabes*

La première phase de l'expansion arabe et la réaction de l'empire byzantin sont pratiquement connues grâce à la *Chronique de Théophane*. L'origine des informations transmises par cette *Chronique* ont déjà fait coulé beaucoup d'encre, tandis qu'il est toujours discuté si le compilateur est Théophane ou

Georges le Syncelle. Ces questions ont reçu de réponses même si elles ne sont pas toujours satisfaisantes. Objet de cette intervention n'est ni l'historicité de ces informations ni leur origine, mais la façon dont *DAI* les exploite. Signalons que *DAI*, consacre aux Arabes les chapitres 14 à 22 et une partie du ch. 25. Pour cela il fait appel à plusieurs sources sans les nommer, excepté Théophane, dont il note qu'il constitue sa source pour les ch. 17, 21, 22, 25, bien qu'il y ajoute des éléments venant d'autres sources (ch. 22) ou des éléments venant de Théophane qui ne concernent pas les Arabes (ch. 25). L'analyse de ces chapitres suggère l'existence d'un fascicule autonome d'histoire des Arabes. L'épine dorsale du fascicule reste ce que *DAI* appelle *Chronique de Théophane* à laquelle sont ajoutés des informations venant d'autres sources. Le *Mutinensis Gr. 179 (III F 1)* qui ne transmet que l'histoire des Arabes confirme cette hypothèse. Les éditeurs du *DAI*, ont inséré le fascicule à l'édition en y ajoutant la première partie du ch. 25, provenant de ce que *DAI* appelle *Histoire de Théophane*, passage qui devait faire partie du ch. 23. Puisque le fascicule fait état de la prise de Crète par les Arabes sous Michel II, sa formation date après de cet événement. En outre le compilateur puise aussi de Georges le Moine, fait qui place la constitution du fascicule après le milieu du IXe s. mais il est discuté si sa formation peut être attribuée à Constantin VII.

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