

Symposium 1949

La cause es suces

Militaires es Arabs

A.A. Vasiliev, Byzantium and the Arabs

The only part of "Byzantium and the Arabs" that seems to have been completely composed by the author, is an "Introduction and a "Part one", dealing with considerations about the Pre - Islamic Arabia, the migration of the Arab tribes towards the north, the Christianity of the Arabs of the Syrian desert, and the relations between the Romans and the Arab tribes from the time of Julian the Apostate till the time of Justinian.

This part is at the beginning often confused and disordered. There are parts of an "Introduction" with a special numeration and others also called "Introduction" with a new and double numeration, so that it is not easy to see where, in the mind of A. A. Vasiliev, finished the Introduction and began the main development. In the pages dealing with the Syrian desert and the migration of the Arab tribes from one part, with the old Arab kingdoms from the other part, one sees not the leading idea, and the chronological order is not very good observed. The chapters containing the accounts about the relations between the Arabs and the Romans at the time already above indicated, seems to me to be very useful and can be published.

For an eventual publication of the whole, I believe that, following partly the indications given by Vasiliev himself in the small sheets to be found herewith, subtitles must be added as I have pointed out in the following remarks. I have noticed there after the corrections, additions and modifications that I am proposing to make for an eventual publication of this part of the planned book.

Introduction: p. 1 - 7

P. 2. To be added to the footnote 1):

The H. Pirenne 's thesis about the beginning of the Middle Ages and the cutting of the commercial relations between the East and the West has been refuted by Sabbe, in the *Revue Belge de Philologie et d' Histoire*, 14 (1935), p. 811 - 848 and 1261 - 1288. The commercial relations between the East and the West ceased not with the Arab conquest, only the trade routes were modified (cf. E. Stein, *Introduction à l' Histoire et aux Institutions byzantines*, in *Traditio VII* (1949 -

1951), p. 121, п. 1) E. Stein, op. cit., p. 104, has pointed out that, after the Arab conquest, the Byzantine Empire lost his character of universal power, that he had to share the civilized world with the Islam and that he was from this time forward only the greatest power of the Christianity.

P. 8 (1 double numeration): Sub - title: Pre - islamic Arabia; Mecca.

The first lines of p. 8 - 9 (1 - 2) must be condensed: Arabia, which must be regarded as being the whole area of Arab occupation, as “the land of the Arabs” including the Syrian desert, and not only as the peninsula to which the name is often confined, had always been full of life during the centuries that preceded Islam. The characteristic feature... etc.

P. 12 (5) To be condensed: The richest among the cities which were along this trade route was Mecca (ancient Macoraba). About the fifth century A. D., the Arab tribe of Kuraish began to dominate in this city which rapidly growing very wealthy, and a rich merchant aristocracy raised (note 8). Since the neighbourhood of Mecca ...etc

Note 8): Cf . Goldziher, Die Religion des Islams, 103 (Die Kultur der Gegenwart, ed. by P . Hinneberg, Die Religionen des Orients (1913) III, 1, 2d ed.) “With the dominance of the nobility, Mecca assumed a materialistic, arrogantly plutocratic character, and deep religious satisfaction could not be found there”.

P. 13 (6) To be added after the words...A. Wensinck: in the article “Mecca” of the Encyclopaedia of Islam.

P. 18 a (10). Sub - title: The Syrian and Arabian desert and the migration of the Arab tribes towards the North.

P. 18 a 2 (17). Here I have replaced p. 17, which Vasiliev took out for later period, and may be at this place, between the p. 18a (10) and 18 b (11).

P. 18 (13) To be added to note 1): For the migration of the tribes toward North Arabia, Mesopotamia and Syria, see Caetani, Annali, II, 2, 853 and O. Blau, Arabian im sechsten Jahrhundert, ZDMG, XXIII.

The small sheet with note 2 is to be dropped.

P. 18 e (14) The small sheet is to be dropped.

P. 21 (15). Sub - title: The Arab kingdoms in the border land:

P. 21 (15) This page must be preceded by a few words, so that a transition is made between the precedent account and the following:

Long before Christ, in the border land between the Arsacid Empire and Syria, the Arabs of the trade routes founded kingdoms, as the kingdom of the Abgar in Edessa, and the kingdom of Nabataea in the east of Palestine. In Syria also, there were small Arab dynasties, in Emesa or in the Anti - Liban.

P. 24 (21) Sub - title: Christianity in the Syrian desert.

Christianisme dans l'Empire perse, 19 sq and De Lacy O'Leary, Arabia before Mohammed, 157.

P. 25 a (25) Sub - title: Imru' u'1 - Qais, [Imru al qays] the King of all the Arabs.

P. 25 (31). See at this page my addition in a footnote.

P. 25 h (32). Sub - title: Relations between Romans and Arabs.

P. 26 (33) a) Julian the Apostate: Note 2: To be added: cf. A. Musil in Kusayr Amra, Vienna, 1907, vol. I, p. 130

P. 27 (34) b) Valens.

P. 28 (35) To be added in the footnote: cf. A. Musil, loc. cit.

P. 29 (36) Sub - title: Accounts about the relations between the Arabs and the Romans / in the hagiographic literature. / or Syrian Christians

P. 42 (35) See the remark at this page.

P. 43 (36) and 44 (37) dealing with Arab incursions into Adiabene (this is not in byzantine territory) must be in a footnote to p. 42 (35). See at this page.

P. 49 (36). A note is to be added: 1) There were also Monophysites in the East. See Labourt, Le christianisme dans l'empire perse, p. 217 sq, 239 sq .

P. 60 (52). Sub - title: The story of Amorcesos at the time of Leo I (457-474)

P. 63. Sub - title: The story of the Arab Adid at the time of Anastasius I (491-518)

P. 64. Sub - title: The time of Justin I (518-527)

P. 65. Sub - title The sanctuary of Resapha.

P. 69. Sub - title: The Saracens in the Pratum Spirituale of John Moschus.

P. 72. Sub - title: The Arabs, Byzantium and Persia. The Limes Orientis.

P. 86. Justinian's Novel 102, and Novel 103.

P. 99. The Lakhmids and the Ghassanids.

P. 117 The journey of the poet Imru'u'1 - Qais to Constantinople.

P. 123. All this page should be a footnote.

P. 124 The novels of Justinian and of Justin II about the marriages in the Oriental provinces.

P. 133 - 134 - 135. These pages should be a footnote. I am not sure that the expression “be liable to the extreme penalty” (has not the meaning of “capital pain”, or “capital punishment” as in the law of Valentinian and Valens (p. 137).

P. 142. To be added in a footnote: See on the novels of Justinian and of Justin above analyzed an article of M. Shangin, Vizantiiskie meropriatiya po okhrane granits (in russian) in Istorik Marksist, t. 92 (1941) n. 4, p. 80 - 92 (Institut istorii Ak. Nauk SSSR, 1941).

General remark. In this “Part One”, A. A. Vasiliev failed to give a complete account of the relations between Byzantium and the Arabs at the pre - islamic time. Many episodes of this relations were left aside. For the time of Justin I, he has given a complete account in his book about this emperor, but for the time of Justinian, he have only given a brief survey of the relations between Persia and Byzantium, and of the relations between Byzantium and the Lakhmids and Ghassanids. The negotiations with the others Arabs as the kings of Kinda, for instance, are missing in this part. Perhaps, as A. A. Vasiliev intended to publish later a book about Justinian, whose he considered his monography about Justin I as an introduction, he has deliberately left aside an account about this questions.

If this “Part One” is to be published, and I believe that it may be, preliminary remarks must be made in order to give advice to the readers that this posthumous publication is only fragmentary. But I think that many accounts and details can be very useful for many scholars, chiefly the Arabists who are not familiar with the Byzantine history and the Byzantines sources.

M. Canard

En dehors de cette “Part One” de “Byzantium and the Arabs”, Vasiliev a laissé encore quelques sections rédigées et ayant trait à une période postérieure à celle envisagée dans “Part One”.

Il s’agit: de

19) Les voyages de Mahomet en Syrie et en Egypte avant sa mission.

C’est uniquement une revue des sources bien connues sur ces faits légendaires (le voyage en Egypte n’a aucun fondement historique et les voyages en Syrie sont probablement tout aussi légendaires), et des appréciations d’auteurs modernes sur la valeur de ces informations que sont suspectes dans l’ensemble.

Ce chapitre ne présente pas grand intérêt et devrait être résumé.

29) Les lettres de Mahomet aux souverains voisins.

Il y a d'abord, sans titre, trois pages qui semblent le brouillon d'une introduction à ce chapitre. Puis viennent 17 pages avec le titre. Vasiliev passe en revue les opinions exprimées par différents orientalistes sur l'authenticité de ces lettres. Après quoi, il donne la traduction de deux versions de la lettre à Héraclius, et d'une réponse d'Héraclius.

A cela pourrait être rattaché un chapitre sur l'ambassade légendaire d'Abû Sufyân, l'ancêtre des Omeyyades, à Héraclius, au cours de laquelle aurait été présentée à Héraclius une lettre du Prophète. Mais ce chapitre n'a pas été rédigé à proprement parler, autrement que sous la forme de notes reproduisant la traduction de quelques fragments arabes relatifs à ce sujet.

L'ensemble présente l'aspect de quelque chose d'incomplet et d'inachevé.

39) Les expéditions envoyées par le Prophète sur les confins de la Syrie byzantine.

L'exposé des faits est présenté d'après les sources arabes et les travaux européens (Mednikov, Wellhausen, Caetani, Hamidullâh etc), sans grande originalité, d'une façon très diffuse. Cela ne pourrait être publié que si le récit était considérablement condensé, c'est à dire presque entièrement refait. Sous sa forme actuelle, il fait double emploi avec l'exposé de Caetani dans les *Annali*. Il ne comporte ni introduction ni conclusion. Beaucoup de corrections à faire dans la graphie des noms propres arabes.

Les autres papiers laissés par Vasiliev sur la question des relations entre Byzance et les Arabes au début de l'Islam ne sont que des notes bibliographiques sur les sources, des extraits de ces sources en différentes langues, et des extraits d'ouvrages secondaires, c'est à dire simplement du matériel rassemblé pour être mis en oeuvre plus tard, et qui n'est d'ailleurs pas complet.

Symposium:

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library - April 28 - 30, 1949
Byzantium and the Arabs under Muhammed and his Immediate Successors, 622 -
661. The Causes of the Arab Military Successes.

Alexander Vasiliev

On Monday, June 8, 632 of our era, in Arabia, in the city of Medina, the Prophet of Arabia, the Prophet of Allah, Muhammed, founder of one of the largest world religions, passed away as our Arab sources report, in the arms of his favorite wife Aysha, the First Lady of Islam, who at that time was but eighteen years old. His death between sixty and sixty – five, – the date of his birth has not been definitely fixed – came as an unexpected shock to Medina.

And three years later, in 635, the Arabs took possession of Damascus; in 636, after the battle on the banks of the river Yarmuk, they conquered the entire province of Syria; in 637 or 638 Jerusalem surrendered, after a siege which had lasted two years. Simultaneously with these campaigns the Arabs conquered Mesopotamia and Persia.

At the close of the thirties, they appeared at the eastern border of Egypt and, in 641 or 642, occupied Alexandria; towards the end of the forties the Byzantine Empire was forced to abandon Egypt, the granary of Constantinople, forever. The conquest of Egypt was followed by further advances of the Arabs along the western shores of North Africa. By the year 650, eighteen years after Muhammed's death, Syria, Upper Mesopotamia, Palestine, Egypt, and a part of the Byzantine possessions in North Africa were under Arabian sway.

The Arab conquest, which brought confusion upon both Mediaeval Europe and Asia, was without precedent. The swiftness of their victory is comparable only to the conquests by which the Mongol Empires of Attila, Jenghiz Khan and Tamerlane were established. But these Empires were as ephemeral as the conquest of Islam was lasting. The swiftness of the Arab conquests was indissolubly connected with the diffusion of their religion, Islam, and, as Pirenne writes, "The lightning - like rapidity of the diffusion of Islam was a veritable miracle as compared with the slow progress of Christianity.

1. Henri Pirenne, Muhammed and Charlemagne, New York, 1939, p. 141.

One may say, when we call the victorious Arab campaigns which lasted from 635 to 650, i.e. fifteen years, astounding enterprises, we may exaggerate their promptness: fifteen years, is a term long enough to achieve many conquests. Alexander the Great, after crossing the Dardanelles in B.C. 330, had reached India in 327, in three or four years. But he had at his disposal a very well trained army, which his father Philip, had organized, – a new and truly national army, perhaps the greatest military machine yet created. Napoleon, in ten years, before his catastrophe in Russia, had conquered the whole of Western Europe. But he also

had at his disposal an excellent army which was wholeheartedly devoted to him, and which was ready to follow him anywhere.

There was no trace of any army among the Arabs, when they opened their first campaigns in Syria. Unpreparedness of Arab troops, or, better to say, of Arab bands, for conquests was amazing.

The early history of the Arab invasions and conquests belongs to one of the darkest periods of history in general. We are walking here into a multiplicity of many intricate historical problems, where many essential elements are shrouded in obscurity, wrapped in legend and conjecture. One of the greatest orientalist of the second half of the nineteenth century, Theodore Nöldeke, stated that having, in his younger days, planned a work on the history of the early Muslim Empire, he was finally deterred from carrying out the scheme by his inability to offer any satisfactory account of the Prophet's character. It is true that now, through the labours of DeGoeje, Wellhausen, Mednikov, and Caetani, a complete revolution in our views has been effected. We have, for example, learned to differentiate the various schools at tradition, of which that of Irak has produced an historical novel which can hardly be classed as actual history; but upon which

2. See A. A. Bevan, in CMH, II, p. 327.

3. See C. H. Becker, *ib.*, II, p. 337.

the description of the Arab campaign has, for a long period of time, been based.

It has been and is sometime a customery even now to explain the Arab conquests in the seventh century by the religious enthusiasm of the newborn Muslims, which was one of the main causes for their striking military successes in their combat with the two world powers of that period, Persia and Byzantium. Their religious enthusiasm had prepared the fanatical Muslims to regard death with disdain, thus rendering their attacks invincible. This view, for the opening pages of their victorious campaigns at least, must be recognized and rejected as unfounded.

But before embarking on this problem, I wish to cast a glance at Arabia, - what Arabia was before Muhammed and in his life time.

Geographically, Arabia is the south - western peninsula of Asia, the largest peninsula on the map of the world, if we do not designate Europe as the colossal peninsula of the continent of Asia, as many scholars do. With the exception of the mountains and some highlands the land consists mainly of desert and some oases. As for climate, Arabia is one of the driest and hottest countries in the whole world. The inhabitants of Arabia tell into two main groups: nomadic Bedouins, who were a majority at the population and settled folk. The Bedouins lived in tribal organizations; lasting and bloody struggle between tribes was the characteristic feature of their activities and their interests. Their religious conceptions were quite

primitive and there was no trace of unity among various Bedouin tribes, which all belonged to the Arabian race.

Besides the Bedouins, there were the settled inhabitants of cities and hamlets which sprang up and developed particularly along the trade routes, mainly on the caravan road leading from the south to the north, from Yemen to Palestine, Syria and the Sinai peninsula. The richest among the cities along this route were Mecca (Macoraba, in ancient writing) and Yathrib, the future Medina, situated farther north. About the fifth century A. D. a distinguished Arab tribe of Kuraish began to dominate in the city of Mecca, and the material interest of this money – loving Meccan aristocracy were not neglected, so that the city was rapidly growing very wealthy. According to one scholar, “with the dominance of the nobility Mecca assumed a materialistic, arrogantly plutocratic character, and deep religious satisfaction could not be found there.” For a rest from their strenuous

4. Goldzher, Die Religion des Islams, p. 103. Die Kultur der Gegenwart, ed. by P. Hinneberg, Die Religionen des Orients, III, 1. 2. Aufl. (1913). A. Vasiliev, History of the Byzantine Empire, I, p. 247; In French, I, p. 267; Spanish, I, p. 255 - 256.

materialistic activities, the Meccan aristocracy went to their favorite resort situated less than a hundred miles to the southeast of Mecca, to the city of al - Taïf, nestling among shady trees at an altitude of about 6000 feet, “the Spa of Arabia,” a bit of Syria transported to Hidjaz, the Riviera of the fortunate Meccans. Yathrib, the future Medina, became also a very prosperous city. Commercial activities seem to have become so important and so absorbing that they might sometimes have disturbed the harmony of matrimonial life among the Arabs. According to an Arab source, Abu - Bakr forced his son to divorce his wife, the beautiful Atikah, because she prevented him from doing his commercial transactions successfully. How she did this, we do not know.

5. P. H. Lammens, “La Mecque à la veille de l’hégire”, Mélanges de l’Université Saint - Joseph Beyrouth (Syrie), IX, fasc. 3 (1924), p. 254, n. 5 (Aghani, XVI, 133).

Foreign merchants, Jews and Christians, were well known along the trade routes in Arabia, and the merchants of Mecca, before Muhammed, had been exposed to their influence while traveling abroad with their caravans. In the sixth century, the energetic Kuraish of Mecca had created a flourishing center of commerce in their city, so that Mecca had been the capital of a vast commercial empire before it became the holy city of Islam. Mecca had maintained commercial agreements with the Negus of Abyssinia, and the rulers of Yemen in the south, as well as with the

Phylarchs of the Ghassanids and the Lachmids in the north, who were very important, as we shall see, for the discussion of our problem. Under the resourceful administration at the Quraish the sanctuary of Kaaba (the Cube), which had existed as a pre-islamic pagan sanctuary long before Muhammed, was on the way to become the central sanctuary of pagan Arabia.

6. J. Obermann, *Islamic Origins. A Study in Background and Foundation. The Arab Heritage* (Princeton, 1944). p. 64.

As I have just mentioned, for the problem which we are discussing at present, it is extremely important to remember that along the vague northern border of Arabia, on the very fringe of the Arabian [note in between: But I must say that Abu-Bakr's son was so upset by his enforced divorce, and his grief was so great that his father took pity on him and allowed him to take his beautiful wife back before the divorce was final] desert, there were, during the early Byzantine period, the two Arab dynasties. One, the dynasty of the Ghassanids in Syria, monophysite in its religious doctrine, depended upon Byzantium; and the duty of its rulers, or phylarchs, was to defend the Byzantine provinces of Syria and Palestine against predatory inroads of the enemies from the east. The other Arab dynasty, the Lakhmids, in southern Mesopotamia, nestorian in its doctrine, was a vassal state of the Persian Sassanids; its duty was to defend the western border of the Persian Empire. Apparently both vassal states ceased to exist in the early seventh century, after the Persians had conquered Syria and Palestine. And it is very essential to keep in mind that, at the time of the Arab advance, under Muhammed and his immediate successors, there were no political organizations of any sort, north of the peninsula. But if politically there two client states had been eliminated by the victorious Persians, their racial composition survived. They were Arabs, and their Christianity, monophysite or nestorian, was never deeply rooted. The Arabs of the peninsula, crossing the border, met at once a kin population, of the same race, of the same language; a population which was not very happy under the supremacy of the two great Empires.

Muhammed

Being merchant and traveller before his mission, Muhammed might have been acquainted with the fertility and prosperity of Syria. An opulant woman, named Khadija, who later was to become his wife, sent him, about the year 594, to Syria on a commercial expedition, which he directed with conspicuous success. Thus, if

we regard Muhammed's trading journeys into neighboring lands as an historical fact – some scholars express doubt regarding them – we must admit.

7. See Caetani, *Annali*, I, p. p. 132 - 143 (113 - 116)

that he had visited Syria before the devastating Persian campaigns, which took place at the beginning of the seventh century, and had seen the country in a state of relative prosperity.

Muhammed himself was an unschooled man. The question has even been fiercely debated, both among Moslems and Christians, whether he could read, and whether he ever learned the Arabic alphabet. At all events we do know that, in his later years, whenever he wished to record anything in writing he employed a secretary. If it is so, we may conclude that his information was derived entirely from oral sources, or from his own experience.

It would be out of place to discuss here the very obscure process whereby Muhammed, an uneducated man, merchant and trader, was led to become interested in religious questions, to believe in his divine mission and finally to become the founder of one of the world religions; how the modest preacher of penitance and morality in his own family, at the age of about forty, became a prophet, and later the chief of a political community. As far as I can understand, this process is still altogether not satisfactorily elucidated. But for us, for the subject which we are discussing at present, it is very important to point out that all the above - mentioned characteristic features of Muhammed give us no reason whatever to expect that he might be a military leader on a larger scale. His military ambitions were confined to Medina and some adjoining regions; and it is not to be forgotten that he had no regular army; at his disposal there were only the bands of unruly rebellious Bedouins.

It is significant that although the Arab biographical literature has devoted much attention to Muhammed's life and activities, many sides of his spectacular career, as I have emphasized above, are nevertheless wrapped in obscurity. It is known that the glory of the literature of the Moslems is its literary biography, one of the marvels of their literature and culture. There is no nation, nor has there been any which like them during twelve centuries has recorded the life of every man of letters. I wish to mention one name only, Ibn - Hajar, chief judge (qadi) of Cairo, who knew the Koran by heart when only nine years old. He compiled, in the first half of the fifteenth century (d. 1449), a stupendous biographical encyclopedia, which contains on a rough calculation about nine thousand biographies of persons who know Muhammed. The real aim of the author was to supply a correct and copious list of the men, who either saw the prophet or directly learned about him from these eye - witnesses. Ibn - Hajar's productivity was amazing: in addition to the above mentioned biographical encyclopedia, he compiled several other

voluminous works. In connection with his stupendous literary accomplishments, an amusing episode has survived in Arab tradition, which shows that, in spite of his numerous writings, he as a human being was not worn out and has preserved in his nature a measure of cheerfulness and satisfaction: after finishing one of his works, which comprises eleven volumes with an introduction, he was so overjoyed to have the good fortune to complete the work that he gave a sumptuous dinner at a cost of 500 dinars, and no Muhammedan refused to take part in it.

8. From the Greek - Latin denarius, the unit of gold currency in the Caliphate, with a nominal value of about 10 s., \$ 2.40. 500 dinars make about \$ 1200.

9. See A. Sprenger, A Biographical Dictionary by Ibn Hajar, vol. I (Calcutta, 1856), preface. Abdul - Hai vol. III (Calcutta, 1888), p. 3-8. Bibliotheca Indica.

In order to show how poorly we are informed of primitive Islam and of the religious hopes and expectations of the founder of Islam, Muhammed himself, I wish to quote the views of three profound students of Islam. Goldziher writes, "There is no doubt that Muhammed thought of spreading his religion beyond the borders of Arabia and transforming his teaching, originally communicated only to his nearest relatives, into a force which would dominate the entire world". Another scholar, Grimme, states that on the basis of the Koran, one is led to believe that final aim of Islam was the complete possession of Arabia. Finally, the third scholar, Caetani, proclaims that the Prophet never dreamed of converting the entire land of Arabia or all the Arabs.

10. References in Vasiliev, I, 252 - 252.

Byzantium viewed Islam not as a new religion but as one of the Christian sects, with which the government was accustomed to struggle during several centuries. Byzantine writers argue against Islam in the same manner as they did against Monophysites, Nestorians, and other so - called heretics. John Damascene, a member of a Saracen family, who lived at the Muhammedan court in the eighth century, did not regard Islam as a new religion, but considered it only an instance of secession from the true Christian faith similar in nature to other earlier heresies. In the conception of Mediaeval Western Europe Islam was not a distinct religion, but one of the Christian sects, akin to Arianism; and in the later Middle Ages, in the thirteenth century, Dante, in his Divina Comedia, considered Muhammed a heretic and calls him "Seminator di scandalo e di scisma" (Inferno, XXVIII, 31 - 36), - a sower of scandal and schism".

From the ordinary Muslim tradition, at first sight, we may think of having some material which shows that Muhammed contemplated the conversion not only of Arabia but of the world – he dispatched messengers to the tip Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, to the Persian king, to the Negus of Abyssinia, to the governor of Egypt, and to various other smaller potentates, summoning them to recognize his divine mission and adopt Islam. But the evidence for this story is by no means satisfying, and presents so many suspicious features that it may be doubtful whether the narrative rests on any real basis.

Here I give two specimens of this tradition. Many Arab writers tell us the ridiculous story that Heraclius yielded obedience to Islam; that he was ready not only himself to be converted to Islam but also to convert his subjects; and only the decisive opposition of his people prevented him from conversion. Another example: in his message to the governor of Alexandria, Egypt, Muhammed urged him to adopt Islam. The governor promised to consider the message, treated the envoy with all honour, and sent back with his vague reply some valuable presents, which included two Coptic maidens, Mary, who is described as being exceedingly beautiful, of fair complexion, with curling hair, whom Muhammed took as his concubine, and his sister Shirin; among other presents, the governor sent Muhammed his mule, Duldul – absurdly said, as Butler writes, to be the first mule in Arabia, - his ass Nafur (Yafur), and a bag of money. Naturally, such traditions cannot be considered very reliable.

At the moment of Muhammed's death, Arabia was neither politically nor religiously unified. Only a minority of the Arabs, mostly the Bedouins, were converted to Islam; and most of them continued to follow their old primitive religious customs. There was no foundation whatever for religious enthusiasm of the masses. I wish to give you here, in literal translation, a passage from one of the best sources for our period, from an Arab chronicler, Tabari (d. 923). Do not forget that this is a Muhammedan source. Tabari writes that immediately after Muhammed's death and after Abn Bakr's proclamation as the first caliph, "the Arabs abandoned Islam; all the tribes betrayed, here an entire tribe, there a portion of a tribe; hypocrisy revealed itself; Jews and Christians raised their heads; the Moslems, after the loss of their Prophet, being few in number and facing a great number of their enemies, proved similar to a flock of sheep roaming in the darkness of a rainy winter night".

11. Tabari, I, 4, p. 1848, 1. 3 - 6. In Russian by Mednikov, II, 1, p. 137. Ibn – al-Athir, II, p. 253, 1. 3 - 5.

This is important evidence of the fact that Islam was very weak in the thirties of the seventh century, when the Arab campaigns began.

The Ridda War

But we have another fact which plainly shows that any question of religious enthusiasm as a result of the new faith, at that particular moment, must be totally discarded. The news of Muhammed's death appeared to let loose all the centrifugal forces of the new State. As soon as the news of his death was known, many tribes seceded from Islam, energetically fought for their former chaotic independence, and had to be subjected again in bloody wars and then reconverted. The Bedouins were afraid of their political dependence on Medina. In Arab tradition this war, which is termed the Ridda War, the war of apostasy, the war of secession, is of greatest importance and significance for our question. A distinguished Arab general, Khalid ibn al - Walid, who was, according to C. Becker (CMH, II, 336), without doubt a military genius of the first rank, suppressed in blood the revolt and was the actual conqueror of the Ridda. The final blow to the apostasy was inflicted probably about one year after the Prophet's death, i. e. in 633. For us the Ridda War, which at first sight belongs exclusively to the history of Arabia proper, is of essential importance as showing that one or two years before the military campaigns in Syria and Palestine started, the Arabs had not yet openly converted to Islam in their majority and had fought stubbornly to save not the new religion but their own political independence from the imperialistic policy of Medina – the independence which went back to their incessant tribal feuds and predatory inroads.

After the Ridda war had been finished, Abu Bakr apparently wanted to get security from rebellious elements which, although utterly destroyed, might have been dangerous in the future. His plan was to distract Bedouin attention from local Arabian feuds and troubles and other aims outside Arabia. According to another important Arab source regarding the conquest of Syria, the Arab historian al-Baladhuri (d. 892): "When Abu - Bakr was done with the case of those who apostatized, i.e. with the Ridda, he saw fit to direct his troops against Syria. To this effect he wrote to the people of Mecca, al - Taïf, and to some other regions, calling them for a "holy war" (in Arabic jihad) and arousing their desire in it and in the booty obtainable from the Greeks. Booty was one of the first inducements to war in the period of the first Arab inroads to Syria and Palestine. This was the inducement which led Arab bands to leave their home in Arabia and to embark on new adventures. The mention of the "holy war" (jihad), in Baladhuri's text, must not trouble us. The author lived and wrote in the second half of the ninth century, in

the period or the Abbasid dynasty, when the early history of the Arab conquests had been completely remodelled and distorted, according to the new trend of glorifying Islam and explaining the successes of the opening years through religious enthusiasm. The doctrine of the “holy war” (jihad) had not been worked out in the life - time of Baladhuri, ed. De Goeje, p. 107. In English by Hitti, I, 165. the Prophet, but it has developed and taken definite shape, as we use this term now, only gradually, in connection with the gradual process of the conquests. At the beginning, the Arabs were conquering only in order to gain booty from various regions.

13. M. Canard, “La guerre sainte dans le monde islamique et dans le monde chretien”, Revue Africaine, Nos. 368 - 369, Alger, 1936, p. 2. V. Laurent, “L’idée de guerre sainte et la tradition byzantine”, Revue historique du sud-est européen, XXIII (1946), 71 - 98.

Our Arab sources for this early period supply us with the usual peace terms which the Arabs presented to their defeated adversaries. The terms usually consisted of three clauses; only one of them was open to the enemies: 1) either to adopt Islam, with brotherhood and equality; or 2) to pay a tribute or taxes; in this case protection of an inferior status is guaranteed; or 3) if both terms have been rejected, then war “till God decides between us,” war to the end. From these clauses we see that the defeated enemy was to come under certain protection of the Arab authorities even if he had rejected the adoption of Islam. Goldziher says, “The champions of Islam had to deal not so much with the conversion of the infidels, as with their subjection”.

14. Goldziher, Vorlesungen über den Islam (Heidelberg, 1910), p. 25.

Basing our presentation of the early advance of the Arabs upon the results of recent investigations, we cannot help smiling when reading passages in older works on the Arab spirit which enabled the Arabs to carry away everything before them in the first years of their unexpected new greatness, having before their eyes the joys of paradise. For instance, a not very reliable Arab source (al-Wakidi) gives poetical expression to this spirit in the words which he placed in the mouth of a youth fighting under the walls of Emessa, “Methinks I see the black-eyed girls looking upon me; one of whom, should she appear in this world, all mankind would die for love or her. I see in the hand of one of them an handkerchief of green silk and a cap of precious stones, and she beckons me and calls out, “Come hither quickly, for I love thee”.

15. Simon Ockley, The History of the Saracens. I am using the London, 1894 edition, p. 193. The edition from which the present text is printed is in two volumes, published at intervals, in 1757. Gibbon follows Ockley. Gibbon, ch. LI; ed. Bury, V, p. 432. Bury, A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene (395 A. D. to 800 A. D.), II (London, 1889), p. 270. Bury refers to Gibbon.

Sometimes it has been suggested, more or less recently, that the religious movement of which Muhammed was the head coincided with a great national movement on the part of the Arabs who, it is said, had already developed, independently of Islam, a sense of their superiority to other races and were eager to overrun the neighbouring countries. On this question, of course, it is difficult to pronounce a definite opinion, since nearly all our information about such a vague and delicate question comes through later Muslim channels. If, for later times, Berin, CMH, II, 327 – 328, there can be no doubt that in the diffusion of Islam the national feelings of the Arabs played a very important part, in our period, i.e., in the first half of the seventh century, in my opinion, it is very premature to speak about the national feeling among the Arabs of the Peninsula, who had not yet quit their tribal chaotic feuds and internecine disputes.

Another difficulty presents itself when we study the history of the early Arabian campaigns in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt: it is their chronology. The Arabian records of these events are not only distorted by lies or later times, but are terribly confused in their chronology. It is not to be forgotten that the Muhammedan era (in Arabic, the Hidjra; in English distorted form the Hegira) which begins with the year 622, - that of the migration (not flight) of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina – was established by the Caliph Omar in 637 or 638 or 639 (the exact date has not yet been fixed), i. e. fifteen, sixteen or seventeen years after 622. The events between 622 and these three years, which, as we know, were

17. The era was established between the years 16-18 of the Hegira; but the general view is the year 17, 16 July 622, as the starting point.

of greatest importance, had not been recorded chronologically, at the time of their occurrence. In this particular period, some people wrote to Muhammed, referring to his official documents, saying, “Thou art sending us letters undated”.

And even after the Muhammedan era had been established officially, considerable time must have elapsed for the new era to be properly adopted all over the regions which were under Muslim sway. Therefore, we are not surprised to find that later Arab writers dealing with the events of the first fifteen, sixteen or seventeen years

of the Hegira unavoidably caused much chronological confusion. Fortunately, we are a little better informed about the chronology of that period through some Byzantine writers, especially through the Byzantine chronicler of the beginning of the ninth century, Theophanes.

In the lifetime of Muhammed, there was only one campaign to the Syrian border, in 629, an ordinary raid to which the settled peoples of the borderland had long been accustomed. It was the moment when Heraclius, fresh from the ovations of the capital which had greeted the close of his victorious campaigns against Persia, was making his way in one long triumph through Syria to the Holy City. The above - mentioned Arab campaign by itself was of minor significance; and no one could expect at that time that it was the beginning of a new era, quite a new opening page in the history of the world. Curiously enough, the first campaign ended in complete defeat of the Arabs; the remnant of their shattered troops came back to Medina, Gibbon says, "It was an ordinary and trifling occurrence, had it not been the prelude or a mighty revolution". And Hitti states (p. 147): "It was the first gun in a struggle that was not to cease until the proud Byzantine capital had fallen in 1453". The encounter took place at Mutah, east of the southern extremity of the Dead Sea.

At that time, as I have pointed out above, the Arabs had no regular army; they were nothing but predatory bands, - many of them even not Moslem, - who were stimulated by the hope of rich booty in a fertile and prosperous country. On the other hand, Arabia, limited in its natural resources, could no longer satisfy material needs of its population, and threatened by poverty and hunger, as Caetani writes, the Arabs were forced to make desperate attempts to free themselves "from the hot prison of the desert."

18. Caetani, *Studi*, I, 368.

If we sum up what we have said, we may come to the conclusion that the primary causes of the Arab successes, in the opening years of their inroads, on the part of the Arabs, were their eager desire of rich booty in the fertile and prosperous region of Syria, and their racial kinship to the Ghassanids and Lakhmids, just beyond the border.

But of course these motives could not be the decisive causes of the further Arab successes, far beyond Arabia. In order to explain this side of the problem, we must turn to the situation of Syria and Palestine at the beginning of the seventh century.

Towards the epoch of Muhammed and his immediate successors, the population of those provinces was on the verge of moral prostration and physical collapse.

Heraclius ascended the throne in 610; and in the following year (611), the Persians undertook the conquest of Syria, occupied Antioch, the main city of the eastern Byzantine provinces captured Damascus. But the most tragic episode of all was still to be enacted. Upon completing the conquest of Syria, the Persians moved on to Palestine; and in the year 614 began the siege of Jerusalem. The Persian towers and battering - rams broke through the city wall. After twenty days of terrible siege came the overwhelming calamity of the fall of the Holy City. According to one source, "the evil enemies entered the city with a rage which resembled that of infuriated beasts and irritated dragons." Jerusalem was pillaged and Christian

19. Antiochus Strategus. Reference in my History of the Byzantine Empire, I, p. 237.

sanctuaries were destroyed. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher was set on fire and robbed of its treasures. The Patriarch was carried into Persia. Among many treasures transported to Persia from the sacked city, one of the most precious relics of the Christian world, the Holy Cross, was taken to Ctesiphon. The Christians were exposed to merciless violence and slaughter. It would not be out of place to quote here a few lines from a work of the famous Russian scholar, N. P.

Kondakov, who wrote, "This was a disaster unheard of since the occupation of Jerusalem in the reign of Titus, but this time, the calamity could not be remedied.

Never again did this city have an era similar to the brilliant epoch under Constantine, and the magnificent buildings within its walls, such as the Mosque of Omar, never created again an epoch in history. The Persian invasion immediately removed the effects of the imported artificial Graeco - Roman civilization in Palestine. It ruined agriculture, depopulated the cities, destroyed temporarily or permanently many monasteries and lauras, and stopped all trade development."

From this striking

20. N. Kondakov, An Archaeological Journey through Syria and Palestine (St. Petersburg, 1904), pp. 173 - 174. See my History, I, 238.

picture of the results of the Persian invasion, - a picture which clearly portrays the data of our evidence, - we may imagine and be absolutely certain that the regions themselves and their population being in a such a state of physical, economic, and moral collapse, were unable to withstand any new aggression. It is not to be forgotten that, almost immediately after the conquest of Syria and Palestine, the Persians conquered Egypt, the granary of Constantinople. I may say that the fate of the Empire hung in the balance.

It is true that, a few years after these disasters, Heraclius conducted three Persian campaigns, which were crowned by brilliant success. Syria, Palestine and Egypt, in one word, all lost the provinces, were recovered, and the Holy Cross was returned to Jerusalem. Byzantium seemed to be in its heyday again. But these new campaigns, in spite of their success, affected still more deeply the depopulated, ruined and wornout provinces. From this brief sketch of the situation of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, after the two Persian wars – no matter whether they were successful or unsuccessful – we may state positively that the population of these provinces, which still remained, was unable to put up resistance to any aggressor.

In addition the Byzantine troops themselves were weakened after the long, though finally successful, campaigns against Persia, and could not offer adequate resistance to the fresh resources of any enemy. Another extremely important factor must be taken into consideration when we are dealing with the question of why the eastern and southern provinces of the Empire, Syria, Palestine and Egypt, were so easily occupied by the Arabs. This factor is the growing dissatisfaction of their population due to the religious policy of Constantinople. Mostly monophysite, they came into violent conflict with the central government which was avowedly inexorable in regard to their religious demands. Heraclius' official religious policy was a striking contradiction of the religious feeling of the majority of the inhabitants of those provinces. In view of the unyielding policy of the central government, Syria, Palestine and Egypt were ready to secede from the Empire, and preferred to become subjects of the Arabs, who were, for the time being at least, known to be religiously tolerant and particularly interested in obtaining regular taxes from the conquered regions. This was something new and promising in the religious life of those exhausted provinces, a freedom of faith. Moreover, this was a very essential factor which urged their inhabitants to go away easily from the heavy surveillance of Constantinople. The Arabs were welcomed as deliverers, as soon as there was no further need to fear Heraclius. In the treaties with Jerusalem and other cities, one of their clauses guaranteed that the inhabitants would be entirely free to preserve their faith.

In addition, I wish to say that, in their steady, victorious advance, the Arabs were exceedingly fortunate to have found from the beginning very talented military leaders at whose head stood Khalid -ibn -al -Walid, a brilliant strategist, who carefully weighed his chances, and was full of energy and daring, a man before whom, as one writer says, all had to yield. How it happened that their leaders, in a very

21. Becker, CMH, II, 336.

short period of time, succeeded in transforming loose and disorganized bands into

regular well disciplined armies, and in inspiring into their hearts and minds the firm faith in the brilliant future of their new religion, in its universality, we do not know. Such miraculous speedy processes belong to those intangible historical phenomena before which historians, for the time being, at least, stand at a loss.

In the history of the Byzantine Empire, the Arab conquests, in the first half of the seventh century, were of tremendous importance. First of all, the Empire has shrunken considerably in its territory. But we know that, in many cases, the loss of a territory by one or another state, after an unsuccessful war, does not affect deeply the most essential interests of the defeated country: the defeated state, even in its curtailed territory, can live on along the same modified lines as it lived before. But the Byzantine defeat in the seventh century, in the East and in the South, was not a mere territorial loss: for the Empire it was the loss of its most prosperous, richest, economically best developed, most cultured and strategically most important regions. And the size of the lost territory was unusually great. Before the Arab invasions the chief interests of the Empire, - I may say, its flesh and blood, - had already been concentrated in the lost provinces. If we take into consideration the size of the territorial loss and the political, cultural, and economic significance of the lost territory, we must come to the conclusion that the system of the Imperial government as it had been firmly established in the sixth century by Justinian the Great could not run along the same lines. Many new problems arose, and the government must have adjusted itself to the new conditions. Owing to the loss of Egypt which was the granary of Constantinople, a new problem evolved, - that of supplying the unruly and turbulent capital with grain. The defeat of the imperial armies by the new - born Arab troops revealed the unsatisfactory military organization. Drastic reforms should have been made in this respect.

Heraclian and Isaurian reformers, - whether the latter rose to the occasion, or not. This is the subject for another paper. The lost provinces were the most precious elements in the economic and commercial life of the Empire. Energetic measures should have been taken in order to try to restore the lost commercial welfare. The government realized the new conditions and clearly understood the urgent necessity of new forms, of a fresh approach. Therefore we are beginning only now to grasp the causes and bases of the reorganizing activities of the Heraclian and Isaurian periods. After the Arab conquests, the Empire could not live on the former pattern; something new, something more drastic than put new wine into old bottles, should have been enacted. It would be out of place to embark here on the complicated problem regarding the success or failure of the Heraclian and Isaurian reformers, - whether the latter rose to the occasion, or not. The easy loss of the long coastline in the south-eastern basin of the Mediterranean clearly showed that something drastic should have been done also with the navy. In the sixth century, under Justinian the Great, after the conquest of the Vandal Kingdom, in North Africa, the Empire had no sea-foes to fear, and, from the point of view of

the Byzantine government, there was no reason to maintain a powerful navy. The Mediterranean, though all its coasts were not part of the Empire, was practically once more an Imperial lake; so that the sea-forces continued to be regarded as subsidiary. And in the seventh century only, when the Empire had to fight for its own existence with an enemy more formidable than the Vandals, was a naval establishment effectively organized. Under the pressure of the Arab successes, the Empire for the first time realized the vital importance of a powerful navy and the urgent necessity to have it.

[...]

ne, was a vassal state of the Persian Sassanids; its duty was to defend the western border of the Persian Empire. Apparently both vassal states ceased to exist in the early seventh century, after the Persians had conquered Syria and Palestine. And it is very essential to keep in mind that, at the time of the Arab advance under M. and his immediate successors, there were no political organizations of any sort, north of the peninsula. But if politically there two client states had been eliminated by the victorious Persians, their racial composition survived. They were Arabs, and their Christianity, monophysite or nestorian, was never deeply [...]
rooted.