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The Role of Supernatural Powers in Arab-Byzantine Warfare as reflected by Popular Imagination

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To modern mentality, supernatural powers and their intervention in matters of daily life seem as a sort of superstition, but for the ancient and medieval peoples, they were frequently considered the only available interpretation of what was occurring around them, and always the last resort at the time of danger or need. It is very difficult, as Peter Burke has pointed out, to find a distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’, ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ in the Middle Ages.¹

Among medieval peoples, Byzantines and Arabs can present the very clear examples of believing in the 'supernatural'. According to Cyril Mango, the ‘average Byzantine’ inhabited a world dominated by superstition, in a society whose culture appears deficient to a modern observer, and "to the Byzantine man, as indeed to all men of the middle ages, the supernatural existed in a very real and familiar sense."² In his book The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria, Josef Meri presents the medieval Muslim mind in a very similar way. He also demonstrates common features of believing in the ‘holy’ and his supernaturalism among Jews, Christians and Muslims of Medieval Syria, interpreting this by saying:

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¹ Burke, P., *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge, 1987), p.218. ["Our modern distinctions (between rational and irrational, natural and supernatural, religious and superstitious), were in the process of formation during the period; to apply them to the years before 1650, in particular, is to invite misunderstanding."]

"Encountering manifestations of the holy in the pre-modern context occurred within the framework of religion which admitted the ‘supernatural’".3

In the few last decades scholars have paid attention to the supernatural powers and their impact on the Byzantine religious and social thought. Most of the studies dealing with military role of these powers have been mainly concerned with the Theotokos as protectress of Constantinople against enemies' attacks, the tradition that was established during the Avar siege of Constantinople in 626 and continued through later centuries.4 Other studies have treated the tradition of warrior saints and provided references to stories of their miraculous intervention in Byzantine warfare.5 On the side of medieval Arab world, there is a rarity of such studies.

Arabs and Byzantines as rivals having relations and military encounters which extended for centuries, may need an approach that brings together both sides' popular belief in the 'supernatural' in a comparative or an analogical sense. Therefore, the goals of the recent study are not to analyze the origins of the ‘supernatural’ in Christianity and Islam or to concern itself with the historicity of Greek and Arabic sources' narratives and stories, but to understand the importance and impact of such popular beliefs in the Byzantine-Arab relations, particularly in their military confrontations, and how each saw the other's supernatural powers and his beliefs. Also, the paper tries to shed light on both sides' common popular belief in supernaturalism of the same divine powers. Here I will follow the method of Al-Amin Abouseada's study,6 rather than list all the stories and legends of miraculous divine

intervention or the narratives of believing in supernatural powers on both sides, I will study them categorically as a phenomenon within their historical context.

**Al-Awliyā' and the Saints:**

It may be better to begin with the saints. Despite the fact that they seem in a lower position if compared with the celestial powers, yet they were most pervasive in the popular imagination of all aspects of medieval life. To Byzantines and Arabs, "holy men and miracles were an essential part of life".\(^7\) Both sides recognized the saint (walī) as a mediator, holy person, miracle worker, healer, and a warrior for the faith.\(^8\) Meri, in his comprehensive study, has clearly showed the importance of awliyā"s role and impact on the religious and social life of the medieval Muslim societies, albeit he did not give much detail on their imagined military role. The only example that he has presented on such role is the miraculous intervention of the Muslim ascetic Ibn Abī al-Numayr (d.425/1033) to secure Aleppo from a Byzantine siege. As Ibn al-ʿAdīm (d. 660/1261) tells that, when the Domestikos Bardas\(^9\) reached the gate of Aleppo in 373/983, he experienced a vision of the Messiah, who commanded him to lift his siege for the sake of Ibn Abī al-Numayr.\(^10\) A similar story is attributed to the siege of 421/1030, this time the people of Aleppo begged Ibn Abī al-Numayr's intercession to save them from Emperor Romanus III Argyros (1028-34). As a result the later experienced a vision of unidentified divine power, that warned him from the destruction and the defeat which would befall his army if he tried to capture a city where this walī was living.\(^11\) After the Byzantine withdrawal from Aleppo, Ibn Abī al-Numayr became a protector and an

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7 Meri, *cult of saints*, p.10.
8 The Egyptian Hanafi theologian Abu Ja'far al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933) regarded the miracles and stories of saints as genuine: "We believe in what we know of karāmāt (miracles and charismata), the marvels of the awliyā' and in genuine stories about them from trustworthy sources". Al-Ṭahāwī, *Uṣūl al-ʿAqīda al-Islāmīya Allatī Qarrarahā al-Imām Abū Ja'far Aḥmad b. Salāma al-Azdí al-Ṭahāwī*, ed. 'A. al-Izzī (Beirut, 1987), p.198. Also, the later theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) reflected the importance of believing in saints and their supernaturals powers among Muslims: "Among the fundamentals of the people of the Sunna is the belief in the miracles of the saints (karāmāt al-awliyā') and the supernatural acts which God fulfills through them". Ibn Taymiyya, *al-ʿAqīda al-Wāṣfīya*, ed. J. Sourdel-Thomine (Paris, 1986), p.25. [the English translation is of Meri, *cult of saints*, p.10].
9 Bardas Phokas, *the domestikos of the scholai* in the reign of Basil II.
intercessor for its people. As Ibn al-'Adīm records, the lights were seen descending upon the spot where he prayed, and it became an important pilgrimage place.\(^{12}\)

The imagined appearance of the Messiah to a Byzantine person in a vision, as Ibn al-'Adīm's first story demonstrates, was not exception in the Arabic sources. The epic of the princess Ḍāt al-Himma presents cases of Byzantine wise men, generals, monks and princesses who were believed to be experienced visions of the Messiah, sometimes in association with the Prophet Moḥammad, to demonstrate Islam as the true religion and invite them to adopt it.\(^{13}\) The rationale behind the appearance of the Messiah in these stories may be the concern to utilize another supernatural power that the Byzantines believe in, and therefore has an ability to influence them. This may also imply a common popular belief in the other side's supernatural powers, or at least a similar popular imagination.\(^{14}\)

The last suggestion may be supported by other Arabic legendary narratives that aim to imply, from the Arab point of view, a Byzantine popular belief in the supernatural abilities of Muslim awliyā'. One of these legends, that is recorded in several Arabic sources, relates the famous story of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, one of the Prophet Moḥammad's Companions, who died during the expedition of Yazīd against Constantinople in 49/669 and was buried in front of the land walls of the city. According to the Arab tradition, the horsemen road over it to obscure the site, yet it was discovered later and became an object of veneration and pious visits by the Byzantines, who built around it a white shrine, put on it a lamp and used to pray there for rain in times of

\(^{12}\)Ibn al-'Adīm, Bughyat, 1: 461-462.


\(^{14}\)As Josef Meri has pointed out: "The veneration of the prophet Yaḥyāb.Zakarīa (St. John the Baptist) among Muslims was a syncretic cult partly influenced by the Byzantine Christian cult of St. John the Baptist". Muslims used to visit his head's shrine in Damascus seeking blessings. Meri, Cult of Saints, pp.200-201. Also, other scholars have demonstrated that al-Khiḍr, a venerated figure in the Qurān, was sometimes associated with St. John the Baptist. Fowden, E. K., The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran (Berkeley, 1999), pp.179, 190.
drought. This legend most likely left its impact on another late one, this time its hero was the Arab conqueror of Sicily Asad b. el-Furāt (d. 213/828). Here also the Byzantine population of the island used to venerate his tomb and pray there for rain.

Another Legend, recorded by the sufi writer Ibn Hūzān al-Quṣayrī (d.465/1073), also tries to draw a scene of a positive Byzantine response to the supernaturalism of Muslim awliyā’, a response that comes this time from monks. It relates a tale of an Arab lad who was taken captive by the Byzantines. His poor mother entreated a Muslim walī, called Taqī ad-Dīn b. Meḥlīd, for his intercession to liberate him. The walī bowed his head and murmured some words. At the same moment, while the captive lad was coming back to his jail after a harsh workday in the governmental desert stone pits, his iron chains were miraculously opened and became difficult to be closed again despite frequent attempts of the guards and a smith. Finally, the help of some monks was required, and when these monks realized that there is a divine power supporting the captive, they led him safely to the Muslim territories after feeding and supplying him.

Also, there is an Arabic story, recorded by the sufi writer Ibn Abī al-Dunīya (d.281/894), may reflect, like the stories of Messiah's visions, the other side of the picture. This time its hero is a Byzantine Patrikios (Paṭrīq), who was captured, bound in Iron chains and put in prison during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Sulaymān b. 'Abd el-Malik (969/971-17). As the story tells, the captive miraculously disappeared from

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his jail, and when the Caliph ordered summoning the responsible guard for an interrogation, the later clarified that one morning when he was checking the Patrikios's imprisonment, he found it empty except from the iron chains. He also informed the Caliph about the Patrikios's incessant supplication and prayers to an invisible divine power.\textsuperscript{18} The story neither identifies the power which released the Patrikios nor explains the means by which this happened, but it strikingly has characters of many Byzantine hagiographical stories in which miraculous liberation of captives, particularly from Muslim prisons, became a familiar task for the Byzantine saints. In her study on some miracle accounts of early Arab period, Arietta Papaconstantinou has treated war captives as one of two themes that dominated the earliest miracles,\textsuperscript{19} but the only example of a saint's miraculous intervention to release a captive that she presents is a story of a young cleric of St. George's shrine in Paphlagonia, who was taken prisoners by Muslims. He prayed daily to be released and one day St. George came by on horseback and took him back to the shrine.\textsuperscript{20}

Many miracle accounts of such sort are recorded in the Greek hagiography of ninth and early tenth century. The \textit{Life} of St. Ioannikios (in the first half of ninth century) relates a story of an aristocratic man living in a village called Elos,\textsuperscript{21} who was captured by the Arabs and was led away to Syria bound in Iron chains and put in prison. Some of his relatives went to the saint and fell at his feet begging him to liberate their kinsman. On the very night, the saint appeared to the captive and miraculously opened the prison's gates transporting him safely away from all the sentry posts and watchtowers.\textsuperscript{22} In the Miracles of St.

\textsuperscript{20} Papaconstantinou, 'Saints and Saracens', p.327. \textit{Collections grecques de miracle. Sainte Thècle, saints Côme et Damien, saints Cyr et Jean (extraits), saint George}, ed. A.-J. Festugièrre (Paris, 1971), pp.276-278; \textit{Miracula sancti Georgii}, ed. J.B. Aufhauser (Leipzig, 1913), pp.13-18]. Worth to be mentioned that Papaconstantinou has referred to saints' miraculous intervention for releasing war captive as a task that developed later. According to her: "with time, saving and bringing back captives became an important task of saints, and many miracle narratives contain stories of such lucky prisoners of war". Ibid, p.327.
\textsuperscript{21} Its location is unknown, but most probably it was near or within the Mt. Olympos region in Bithynia or the wilderness areas of Lydia, in where the saint lived and moved. \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Life of St. Ioannikios}, trans. D.F. Sullivan, in: \textit{Byzantine Defenders of Images. Eight Saints' Lives in English Translation}, ed. A-M. Talbot (Washington. D.C., 1998), pp.328-330. According to the miracle, since the clear day was dawning, the captive
Nicholas, we read also the story of Peter the Scholarius (in the second half of ninth century), who was originally a soldier captured by the Arabs in Syria and imprisoned at Samara, a misfortune which he regarded as a direct result of his neglect to fulfill a vow to become a monk. He entreated St. Nicholas for help promising that if he obtained his liberty he would go to Rome to take monastic vows. After some difficulty, to overcome which the further intercession of St. Simeon was necessary, the help of the Saints proved effectual, and Peter obtained his liberty. In accordance with his vow he went to Rome and was ordained monk by the Pope.  

In addition to these miracle accounts, there are two similar stories that may belong to the period from Arab conquest of Crete in 828 to the Byzantine reconquest of it in 961. One of them is included in the Miracles of St. George and relates a story of a lad who was taken captive and became a servant of the emir of Crete after a Cretan Arabs' raid on Mitylene, on the island of Lesbos and in which there was a famous church of St. George. The lad's mother entreated the saint to liberate him and finally the saint came to her aid. According to the hagiographer, on St. George's day, and when the lad was just about to fill a cup of wine for his master, a supernatural power took him with the cup from the hall of the emir's palace and brought him to his home across the sea. This story presents a striking parallel to the second one, which is included in the Miracles of St. Nicholas. This time the hero is the peasant's son Basil who lived in the vicinity of Myra and was taken captive by the Cretan Arabs. Like the lad, Basil served the emir of Crete, and like the lad's mother, Basil's parents prayed to St. Nicholas to liberate him. Finally, as in St. George's miracle, Basil was released on the day of St. Nicholas and by a supernatural power that moved him holding a cup into which he was resorted to a thicket, and after a while Saracen shepherds happened to be passing through the same thicket. Their dogs noticed the footprints of the captive, who then trembled in fear. The saint suddenly appeared to him and drove the dogs away. A late Arab story, recorded by the twelfth century historian Usāma b. Munqid, has a striking parallel to this story. According to it, a Muslim captive was claimed to have seen the Prophet in a dream. Waking up in the morning, he found his chain broken and fled walking between his guards. Like the miracle of St. Ioannikios, his flight escaped the notice of his guard, and as in the miracle, he resorted to a cave and his footprint were noticed, but this time God sent heavy snow that totally covered his traces. Usāma ibn Munqid, Kitāb al-’Ibār [=Ousâmaibn Mounkidh: Un emir syrien au premier siècle des croisades1095-1188, ed. H. Derenbourg (Paris, 1886), p.70].

24Aufhauser, Miracula Sancti Georgii, pp.101-103.
pouring wine.\textsuperscript{25} Alexander Kazhdan is the first scholar that has noted the evident parallel of both stories, and as he has suggested: "There is no evidence whatever of a direct borrowing. The path of development of the legend was, probably, the story of miraculous liberation originated in oral form, spread over the whole Aegean basin, and was ascribed in Myra to St. Nicholas and on Lesbos to St. George."\textsuperscript{26}

The hypothesis that these two miraculous stories began and spread in an oral form, and then were transferred to a written one can be extended to cover many other stories and various geographical regions.\textsuperscript{27} As we have already seen, most stories of the saints' miraculous liberation, including the Arabic stories of the sufi writers Ibn Abī al-Duṇīya and al-Qušayrī,\textsuperscript{28} begin with the captive or his family's begging and prayers, and end with the divine intervention and the captive's disappearance from his jail or place of service. The changes always are in the way by which this intervention occurs.\textsuperscript{29} Also, as we can note, all

\textsuperscript{25}Anrich, Hagios Nikolaos, I, pp. 189-195, 273-275.
\textsuperscript{26}Kazhdan, A., "Hagiographical notes (5-8)"$, Byzantion$ 54(1984), pp.176-192, esp. 182 (repr. Idem, Authors and Texts in Byzantium, Variorum, 1993, no. IV.)
\textsuperscript{27}This miracle of St. George passed the oral and written form to be a painted icon during the Crusades. There is a 13th Century image, in the church of Mar Tadros at Bahdeidat (in Lebanon), presents the saint riding over a body of water and holding a small figure behind his back, a child who holds a glass in his right hand and a jug in his left. Cormack, R., & Mihalarias, S., "A Crusader Painting of St. George: "manieragreca" or "lingua franca"." Burlington Magazine 126 (1984), pp.132-139. As Badamo points out, this iconography was widespread in both Syria and Lebanon. See his Image and Community, p.128, and figure 4: p.297. For comprehensive discussions of this miracle and its later transmission from Greek to other languages and cultures, including Coptic and Arabic, see Grotowski, P., "The Legend of St. George Saving a Youth from Captivity and its Depiction in Art," Series Byzantina 1 (2003), pp. 27-77; Badamo, Image and Community, pp.154-157.
\textsuperscript{28}We can also note an analogy between these miracle stories and an Arabic story, recorded by al-Wāqīḍī (d.207/822), in which the Prophet Moḥammad himself is claimed to be appeared one night to some desperate Muslim captives in a dream, released them from the iron chains and disappeared. Waking up, they found their Byzantine guards asleep, took their arms and killed them. Al-Wāqīḍī, Futūḥ al-Šām, ed. T.A. Sa’d (Alexandria, n.d.), 2: p.12. Such stories, and analogy, continued to have an impact on the later popular imagination as the aforementioned story of Usāma b. Munqid may demonstrate. (See note 22).
\textsuperscript{29}One of the few exceptions can be read in the Life of St. Peter of Argos. According to it, an Arab vessel once carried away a young Christian girl destined as a present to the Cretan Amir. The inhabitants appealed to St. Peter for help. Granting their request, he prayed; and shortly after the vessel was captured by a Greek galley and the young captive liberated. Here, the role of St. Peter is only the intercession, and he did not directly intervene to liberate the girl. Vasiliev, A., "The Life of St. Peter of Argos and its Historical Significance", Traditio 5(1947), pp.163-191, esp.175-176.
previous Greek miracle accounts belong to ninth and first half of tenth centuries, the period of Arab victories and raids on the Byzantine territories, particularly on the Aegean coasts and islands by the Cretan Arabs. The numbers that were taken captives and the terrors that befell these regions' populations might be effective factors in frequent attributing such miraculous task to saints.

The second imagined task, which is frequently mentioned in miracle accounts of this period, is these saints' miraculous intervention as local patrons to defend and protect cities, towns or villages, and their populations, from the Arabs' raids and attacks. The Life of St. Andreas records an Arab raid (c.720) on a Cretan fort called Drimeós. According to it, the Arabs arrived in numerous ships and besieged the castle, where the saint and a part of his folk had taken refuge. The attackers fought hard and used their siege engines, but failed to capture it after suffering many losses in their attempts. The credit for their defeat was naturally attributed to the prayers of the saint.\(^{30}\) Also, the Miracles of St. Theodore Tiron include some tales on his defensive role against an Arab attack on his burial city of Euchaïta in 753/754.\(^ {31}\) In one of these miracles, and just before the Arabs approached the city, a respectable lady envisioned the saint on horseback and in full armour actively defending the city, but angels ordered him to leave the way open to the invaders: "Leave them the way open for it is not against God's wish that they fight this land". He obeyed the order but prayed that God should not abandon the people of whom he was the protector. Therefore, although the city was destroyed, its inhabitants were saved.\(^ {32}\)


\(^{32}\) The translation of Zuckerman, "Reign of Constantine V", pp.196-197. See also, Walter, *Warrior Saints*, pp.47-48. Walter interprets Angles' order to the saint by saying: "It seems, however, that the celestial powers were not always favorably disposed towards the inhabitants of Euchaïta". Walter, Ch., "Theodore, archetype of the warrior saint", *Revue des étudesbyzantines* 57 (1999), pp. 163-210, esp.168. While Zukerman ["Reign of Constantine V", p.193] explains it within context of the divine punishment for Constantine V's Iconoclast policy. Worth to be mentioned that the saint appeared in another miracle as a soldier on horseback and rescued a child who had been sold as a slave to the Arabs. Walter, *Warrior Saints*, p.48; Idem, "Theodore", p.168.
Believing in the saints as cities and towns' supernatural patrons was not only a matter of hagiographical treatment; we can meet such role in some historical accounts from the early tenth century. Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (945-59), in his De Administrando Imperio, relates a miracle that thought to be taken place during the siege of Patras by the combined forces of Slavs and African Saracens. According to it, the besieged defenders of the town sent out a messenger to the military governor of the province, with a request to come to the town's aid or to give consent for its surrender. They instructed and gave a signal to their messenger that in the case of the governor coming, he should in his way back dip the standard, but if not, to hold the standard erect. While the messenger was returning with news that there is no military aid, his horse slipped and the rider fell off and dipped the standard (thanks to the intervention of God and the town's patron, the apostle Andrew). The defenders, believing that the governor was coming undoubtedly, opened the gates and sallied out against the enemies. The apostle Andrew then revealed to their eyes mounted upon a horse and forced the attackers to flee: "The Barbarians saw and were amazed and confound at the violent assault upon them of the invincible and unconquerable warrior... the victorious first-called apostle Andrew." 

33In some instances, the protective task of the saints extended to defend their icons, shrines and sanctuaries. In a miracle of St. Theodore Tiron, the Arabs failed to destroy his sanctuary, because their leader had fallen to the ground inside it, rolling about and biting his tongue. Walter, Warrior Saints, p.48; Idem, "Theodore", p.168. Also, according to Theophanes, after an Arab naval raid on Rhodes in 807, the Arab leader, Ḥumayīd b. Ma'yūf the governor of the Syrian coast in the reign of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, crossed Myra on his return journey and attempted to break the tomb of St. Nicholas. But miraculously, he smashed instead another near one. Thereupon "a great disturbance of sea waves, thunder, and lightning fell upon the fleet so that several ships were broken up and the impious Chomeid (Ḥumayīd) himself acknowledged the saint's power and unexpectedly escaped the danger". Theophanes, The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD.284-813, trans. C. Mango & R. Scott (Oxford, 1997), p.663. In a miracle of St. George, a Saracen soldier attacked an icon of him and died when the icon turned his weapon back on him. In another one, a group of Saracens entered a church while on a hunting expedition and one of them shot an arrow at an icon of St. George during the liturgy. The icon turned the arrow back on the attacker, which struck the hand of the Saracen and inspired him to convert to Christianity. Festugière, Collections grecques, pp.275-276, 308-310.

34There is a debate on the date of this event, but it probably occurred in the early tenth century. For the discussion see the commentary in Constantine Porphyrogennetos, De Administrando Imperio, vol. II: Commentary, ed. R.J.H. Jenkins, (London, 1962), pp.183-184.

Popular Byzantine belief in the supernatural powers of local patron saints is well illustrated by John Kaminiates during the Arab attack on Thessaloniki in 904, which was an appropriate opportunity to commemorate Saint Demetrios's frequent miraculous intervention in the city's fate. According to him, all the city's populations hurried to the saint's shrine setting up a chorus of lamentation, and in motivated words called upon the martyr to be their protector against the attackers:

"Listen to our petition, stand up with bold intercession on behalf of us your servants and rescue us from impending disaster, lest the children of the maidservant Hagar boast against us and say, 'Where is their protector?' For you see, most gracious one, that we do not put our trust in spears and shields, but have entrusted everything to your powerful intercession, pinning our hopes on engaging once again your provident concern."

Miracles of local patron saints, which sometimes illustrated them on horseback and in full armour, might be an appropriate environment for the developed pattern of warrior saints, which is usually thought to appear in the context of the Byzantine reconquest of northern Syria during the reigns of the military emperors Nickephoros II Phokas (963-69) and John Tzimiskes (969-76). The new military and religious spirit that dominated this period might put its impress on saints' military role in the Byzantine-Arab warfare. As we have already seen, the miraculous intervention to liberate captives and defend cities against the Arab raids were the dominative saints' imagined tasks during the period in which the Byzantines took most of time the position of defense, but when they

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37Kaminiates, Capture of Thessaloniki, p.39.

38Kaminiates, Capture of Thessaloniki, p.41.

39According to Walter [Warrior Saints, p.292] it is precisely the reign of Tzimiskes that saw the apogee of the cult of the military saints in connection with the introduction of religious practices into army life. While Grotowski [Arms and Armour, pp. 70-73] has dealt with the appearance of the tradition within the context of what he called 'the proto-crusade movement' which was very clear in the reigns of Nickephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes. On the other hand, Badamo has discussed the issue in the context of cross-cultural influences within the Christian-Muslim frontiers and suggested earlier eastern Christian roots for the tradition [Image and Community, pp.36, 291].
turned to the offense, these tasks naturally developed to be at battlefields and outside the Byzantine territories, whether as warriors involving in the fight or as a cult inciting the soldiers to fight.\textsuperscript{40} According to a later account by Nikephoros Gregoras, the most popular warriors Sts. George, Demetrios and Theodore Stratelates, with the archangel Michael, were said to have supported the troops of Nikephoros Phokas besieging Arab-held Chandax on Crete in 961.\textsuperscript{41} A very similar scene could be seen in the Grottaferrata version of the epic \textit{Digenis Akrites}. According to it, Sts. George, Demetrios, Theodore of Tiron and Theodore Stratelates were supporting Digenis Akrites in the fight against the Arabs immediately after Christ, the Virgin and the archangels.\textsuperscript{42}

However, the last imagined task of saints' intervention in the Byzantine-Arab warfare is related to Emperors or Generals' desire for obtaining the holy blessing and advice before the battle, and above all an \textit{ex eventu} prediction that secures victory after it. Reading of the Greek sources, whether hagiography or chronicles, gives the impression that this tradition was influential and continuous through the whole period of the Byzantine-Arab military encounters. The most well known example of this tradition is connected with Petronas's expedition that defeated the forces of 'Umar, Emir of Melitine, at Porson in 863. It seems that the importance of this battle led to its association with many different predictions of holy men.\textsuperscript{43} According to the hagiographer of St. George of Lesbos, the saint received Petronas twenty years earlier than the expedition and prophesied his victory over the Arabs.\textsuperscript{44} Also, it is said that St. Antony the Younger predicted the victory to Petronas when the

\textsuperscript{40} This hypothesis may be appropriate while dealing with the Byzantine-Arab warfare, but there are other examples on these warrior saints' fighting in defensive battles during the same period, mainly against the Rus. On these examples see, Sinclair, K.J., \textit{War writing in middle Byzantine historiography. Sources, influences and trends}, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2012, pp.68-73. But even in these cases, one may suggest that the defensive role of the saints passed the pattern of local patrons to be imperial patrons who defend a whole beleaguered empire.


\textsuperscript{43} This battle was a major victory for Byzantium in its attempts to retake the offensive against the Arabs and establish in eastern border.

imperial order to campaign was issued.\textsuperscript{45} The chronicle of Theophanes Continuatus includes in its account of the expedition the prediction of John, a monk at Mount Latros, that the Byzantines would win the battle.\textsuperscript{46}

About a century later, Constantine VII is said to have written to St. Paul the Younger asking him for his advice before embarking on the expedition of 949 against the Cretan Arabs. The saint replied trying to dissuade the Emperor from an undertaking that was not, as he said, "In God's mind". The later, having already spent large sums of money in preparation for this expedition, chose to carry on with his plans, a choice he bitterly regretted later as the expedition failed.\textsuperscript{47} He also predicted the refusal of the Hamdanid emir Sayf al-Dawlā to accept a truce and an exchange of captives offered by the emperor.\textsuperscript{48}

On the Arab side, we have two narratives. The first implies Arabs' well-awareness of such predictions' influence on the Byzantine decision of war. As al-Dahabi (d.748/1250) records, after a long Arab siege of Constantinople in the reign of the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar b. Abd el-'Aziz (99-101/717-20), Emperor Leo III (717-41) decided to attack the strained and weary Arab soldiers outside the city walls, but he totally abandoned his plan after encountering in his way a Byzantine ascetic who predicted his defeat.\textsuperscript{49} The other narrative strikingly refers to an Arab positive response to the Byzantine holy men's predictions. According to

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\textsuperscript{45} According to the \textit{Life}, the saint had become a spiritual father to Petronas after curing him from a demonic possession. F. Halkin, "Saint Antoine le Jeune et Pétronas le vainqueur des Arabes en 863.", \textit{Analecta Bollandiana} 62 (1944), pp.215-217

\textsuperscript{46}Theophanes Continuatus, \textit{Chronographia}, pp.180-181. A similar account is recorded by Skylitzes who adds that "Petronas came to the capital after achieving such a remarkable victory. He brought along the monk who had foretold the victory, singing the praises of his virtue. He praised and magnified him before the Emperor". Skylitzes, \textit{A Synopsis History of Byzantine History, 811-1057A.D.}, trans. J. Wortley (Cambridge, 2010), pp.100-101.


\textsuperscript{48}"Vita S. Pauli Junioris", p.72. On the ground that the saint is reported as an occasional consultant on matters of foreign relations, Koutrakou thinks that this prophecy might be based on solid knowledge of facts gathered through unofficial contacts. Koutrakou, N., "Diplomacy and Espionage: their role in Byzantine Foreign Relations, 8th-10th Centuries", \textit{Graeco-Arabica} 6 (1995), p.130.

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al-Ḫaṭīb al-Bağdādī (d. 463/1070), on the eve of the expedition of Caliph al-Mu'taṣim (218-27/833-42) against Amorion in 223/838, two of his soldiers visited a Byzantine monk in his cell asking him foretelling the expedition's outcome, he replied that "the king's soldiers, who will conquer Amorion, are unfathered sons". When this prediction reached the caliph, he approved it and said: "I am this king, as most of my soldiers are sons of Turkish and barbarian women".50

In addition to this narrative, there is another well-documented Byzantine account that reflects a similar Byzantine response to the other's ability to predict and prophesy. This time the other is not an Arab holy man but a woman who, as John Skylitzes describes, was "captured among the Hagarenes in one of the foregoing wars, and was talented for this kind of foretelling".51 Emperor Theophilos (829-42), who was then seeking most diligently to know about those who would rule after him, consulted this woman, and she successfully fulfilled his desire.52 According to Genesios, the fame of the woman was propagated by rumor, and all were extolling her powers and asking about the future. All her prophecies became true, and the Emperor became having full confidence in her powers.53

50Al-Ḫaṭīb al-Bağdādī, Tārīḫ Baġdād, ed. B. A. Ma'rūf (Beirut, 2001), 4: 550. Also, Ibn al-'Umrānī (d. 580/1184) records a similar account, but this time Caliph al-Mu'taṣim himself is presented as the person who met the monk. Ibn al-'Umrānī, Tārīḫ al-Ḫulfā', ed.Q. al-Sāmrā'ī (Cairo, 1999), p.106. Al-Asfahānī (d.362/971), in his book on Monasteries, gives many references to Abbasid caliphs, Leaders and ordinary persons' visits to monasteries. One of these narratives records a visit of an Arab, called Abū Bakr al-Anbārī, to the monastery of al-Anwār (the lights) in a village near Amorion. He received a great hospitality from its monks, whose faithful and continuous prayers incited his admiration. Al-Asfahānī, Al-Diyārāt, ed. J. al-'Atyeh (London, 1991), pp.48-52. See also, Kilpatrick, H., "Monasteries through Muslim Eye: The Diyārāt Books", in: Christian at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq, ed. D. Thomas (Brill, 2003), pp.19-37. Consulting monks for advice by the Arabs is also attested by another Greek narrative. According to John Skylitzes, the Arab conquerors of Crete established their camp at Chandax relying on a monk's advice. Skylitzes, Synopsis History, p.46.

51Skylitzes, Synopsis History, p.73. Genesios refers to her as a Hagarene captive woman who "was occasionally seized by a prophetic Pythian spirit". Genesios, On the Reigns of the Emperors, trans. A. Kaldellis (Canberra, 1998), p.64.

52Genesios, On the Reigns, p.64; Skylitzes, Synopsis History, p.73.

53Genesios, On the Reigns, pp.64-65. Genesios in these pages attributes to this woman many prophecies concerning noble persons' futures. The reader of these prophecies, which all were believed to become true, may imagine Genesios as if speaking about a holy woman. But since she was Muslim, Genesios could not openly say this but contented himself with the idea of the prophetic spirit's possession.
Angels and Demons:

Despite the popular beliefs, particularly for the Byzantines, ascribed to the human element, i.e. the holy men, a dominitive supernatural role in the scene of the Byzantine-Arab warfare, there are other invisible celestial powers that sometimes were involved by popular imagination in such role. Angels in particular were frequently utilized by the Arab popular imagination in the context of Byzantine-Arab battles. According to Ibn Abī al-Dunīya, when some Muslims were besieging a Byzantine fort, they saw an angel in guise of the Prophet. They entreated his intercession to conquer it, and he did. Also, al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822) records that the Muslim leader Abū ʿUbayda, on the eve of Yarmūk battle in 13/634, had been foretold the victory by a vision in which he saw white lightened fighters on horsebacks and in full armour. When he related this vision to his soldiers, one of them announced that he likewise had dreamed of white brides with green wings and claws like those of eagles fighting with them.

Appearance of Angels in unhuman form to support the Arabs against the Byzantines is repeated again in the epic of Ḍāt al-Himma. According to it, in a battle between the two sides during the reign of Caliph al-Wāṭiq, the Byzantine victory seemed imminent, but suddenly dust was raised, dimed the visibility and through it fighters similar to monkeys and wolves appeared. They sallied out against the Byzantines and annihilated them. Finally, the caliph ascribed this victory "whether to archangels or to the faithful demons". Such appearance may bear a

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54Al-Wāqidī claims that the Byzantines themselves were well-aware of Angels' interventions to support the Arab armies during their conquest of Palestine, Futūḥ al-Šām, 2: 23, 28. Also, according to the Arab tradition, there are many veiled fighters who suddenly appeared in battles against the Byzantines and often succeeded in turning the situation from defeat to victory. Their supernatural courage and fighting made the Arabs believe that they are angels sent by God to support them. Al-Wāqidī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 12, 164. One of these heroes, according to al-Masʿūdī, is thought to be al-Khīḍr or an angel sent by God when he suddenly broke through al-Qādisyiā battle and bravely fought against the Persians. Al-Masʿūdī, Murūḡ al-Ḍāhab wa Maʿādin al-Gawhar, ed. Q. Wāḥb (Damascus, 1989), 2:161.

55Ibn Abī al-Dunīya, Kitāb al-Awliyāʾ, ed. A. Muḥammad & E.B. Zağlūl (Beirut, 1993), p.35; Idem, Kitāb Muğabī al-Daʾwa, p.62. Some Muslims, according to Ibn al-ʿĪmād, believed that ʿOmar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb was speaking by an angel's tongue. Ibn al-ʿĪmād comments on this belief by saying: "It is proved that God's saints, (al-awliyāʾ), have visions, miracles and marvels. Undoubtedly, ʿOmar is the best of them in this nation (al-ʿUmān)." Ibn al-ʿĪmād, Shaḍarāt al-Ḍāhab, 1: p.179.

56Al-Wāqidī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 258.

Christian impact, since representing angels as birds, eagles and animals, like ox, lion and horse, was known in Byzantine art and literature.\(^{58}\)

While these Arabic narratives may remind us of the scene of warrior saints defending and supporting the Byzantine soldiers in battlefields, there is another story that may also bear a similarity to the Byzantine saints' imagined miraculous intervention to liberate captives. It is the story of Abī Saлим who was believed to be the first Muslim settled in the city of Ṭarsūs. According to Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1199), he is one of three brave Arab soldiers who were famous in fight against the Byzantines. He was captured by the Byzantines who, after failure to tempt him from Islam by means of torture, offered him a beautiful Christian woman because, as they believed, 'Arabs have strong desire for women'.\(^{59}\) Abū Saлим restrained himself and succeeded in converting the woman to Islam and escaping (most probably by a miraculous means).

While on horseback in their way to Dār al-Islām (the Muslim territories) they heard a voice of horses' hoofs and believed that the Byzantines are following them. After praying to God for salvation, they discerned that God dispatched to them witnesses from among his angels to certify their marriage.\(^{60}\) This story is repeated again in the Arabic popular tales Al'layla walayla (the Arabian Nights) without any difference.\(^{61}\) This parallel may lead again to the hypothesis that there is only one story, began and spread in an oral form, and then was transferred to a written one, whether in a chronicle or within an epic.

However, these stories seem to reflect an analogy between the imagined supernatural roles of angels and those which were ascribed to the saints in the Greek hagiography and chronicles. This analogy, if it does not necessarily imply an influence, may lead to the hypothesis of a

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\(^{61}\) Perhaps the only difference between both stories is that while Ibn al-Jawzī relates his story when treating the events of 170/786; the Arabian Nights dates it to the reign of ‘Omar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb and the siege of Damascus in 15/636. See, Matar, N., "Christians in The Arabian Nights", in: *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: between East and West*, ed. S. Makdisi and F. Nussbaum (Oxford, 2008), pp.131-152, esp.149.
similar popular imagination. Vice versa, while saints' imagined supernatural role dominated the scene of these wars in the Greek sources, angels, it seems, rarely appeared in this scene. There are no stories or miracles, as far as I know, imply a direct angelic intervention in Byzantine-Arab warfare, but a mere accidental appearance in the context of rhetoric military speeches and hymns. An appearance which is usually associated with Christ, the Virgin and saints. Such association is clearly manifested in a military oration of Constantine VII, which was written in connection with his military encounter with Sayf al-Dawla the Hamdanid emir of Aleppo, when he implores God to dispatch an angel to protect the army along its route.  

But this supposal cannot be applied to the archangels, particularly the archangel Michael who is usually presented as a "military archangel". He sometimes appears fighting against the Arabs, also in the association with the Virgin and/or the combined warrior saints, as the aforementioned narratives of Nikephoros Gregoras and the epic *Digents*

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62"He Himself will send His angel and He will guide your journey, and may He help to surround you with hosts of angels and to keep you safe from harm at the hands of the enemy…Our Majesty to be joyful and to rejoice in your achievements, and to be emblessed by your heroic deeds through the intercession of the immaculate Mother of God, His mother, and all the incorporeal angelic powers, and the saints who have served Him from eternity and been martyred for His sake". Trans. E. McGeer, "Two Military Orations of Constantine VII", in: Byzantine authors: literary activities and preoccupations. Texts and translations dedicated to the memory of Nicolas Oikonomides, ed. J. Nesbitt (Leiden, 2003), pp.111-138, esp.134. On the eve of war against the Rus in 971, John Tzimiskes likewise went to the church of Hagia Sophia and prayed that "he be granted an angel to go before the army and make straight the road". Leo the Deacon, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, trans. A-M. Talbot & D.F. Sullivan (Washington, D.C., 2005), p.175; McGeer, "Two Military Orations", p.134 n.109. This association is also attested in a military hymn, or a service called *akolouthia*, dated to the mid-tenth century and mainly directed against the Arabs. It contains these lines: "Life-giving son of God, by the prayers of your mother, and by the divine supplications of the angels and gloriously triumphant martyrs, gladden your faithful emperors, shatter the throngs of barbarians, and to the army that worships you, show mercy." (Pertusi, A., (ed.) "Una acolouthia militare inedita del X secolo,” *Aevum* 22 (1948). Eng. trans. Stephenson, P., "Military documents of the mid-tenth century", http://www.paulstephenson.info/trans/military_texts.html

The fame of archangel Michael as a warrior might incite Basil I (867-86), after his failed campaign against Tephrike in 871, to visit the church of archangels and begging them “in obvious distress and grief” not to let him die before destroying this city.\footnote{This association is also manifested in art. Two panels in the Museo San Marco, Venice, show the Archangel Michael in the centre in military costume. Around the border are placed figures of saints, most of them military. Walter, \textit{Warrior Saints}, p.103. Also, this association might reach the cult shrines. As Peers has shown, the Byzantine church often introduced relics of mortal saints into shrines of angels. The reason that he gives is the concern to make the cult of angels palatable to authorities. Peers, \textit{Subtle Bodies}, p.175.}

For the second invisible power, the demons, references to their imagined supernatural role in Byzantine-Arab warfare are very rare in both sides' sources. But we have two significant narratives implying that while demons were usually considered in both popular cultures as an evil power, this did not prevent each side from utilizing them in his favor against the other, but in this case, as the aforementioned story of the epic Ḍāt al-Himma demonstrated, these demons were turned to be "faithful”. This sort of good demons may be also found in Genesios's account about the Arab siege of Syracuse in 877. According to it, Emperor Basil I sent Adrianos with a large fleet to free it. While he was being confined in a port called Hierax, on the southeastern coast of the Peloponnese, a citizen carried to him from some local demons the bad news that Syracuse had already fallen. Adrianos was still skeptical of this story till deserters from the Island confirmed it.\footnote{Genesios, \textit{On the Reigns}, pp.103-104; Skylitzes, \textit{Synopsis History}, p.153. Undoubtedly, the role of demons here seems more helpful if is compared with the abovementioned negative angels' attitude toward Euchaïta during the Arab attack on it in 753/754.}

\textbf{Sacred objects:}

Undoubtedly, crosses, copies of the Qur'ān, icons, relics and other sacred objects are expected to occupy a forward position in the Arab-Byzantine relations as a whole and in their mutual battlefields in particular. They always had a characteristic direct effect on soldiers' morale as being, opposite to other supernatural powers, the only concrete ones that the soldiers can carry, touch and supplicate to in times of need.

\textit{Akrites} demonstrate.\footnote{Genesios, \textit{On the Reigns}, p.106. This fame may also be attested by Constantine VII’s reference to ‘the Archangel Michael’, ‘the Saviour’, ‘the Theotokos’, and ‘the warrior saints’, as familiar military passwords that the generals were secretly received from the emperor. This reference may also attest the supposed usual angels' association with the Christ, the Virgin and warrior saints in the Byzantine Military writings. Constantine Porphyrogennetos, \textit{The Book of Ceremonies}, ed. & trans. A. Moffatt & M. Tall (Canberra, 2012), I: 481; Idem, \textit{Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions}, ed. & trans. J. Haldon (Wien, 1990), p.121.}
Crosses and copies of the Qurʾān were specifically considered the supreme sacred symbols that can bring the victory. The Arab tradition always presents the battles of the two sides, particularly during the Arab conquests, as if between the "worshippers of the Cross" and the "bearers of the Qurʾān"67, and it usually evaluates the size of the Byzantines' armies by numbers of crosses which they were carrying.68 The considerable numbers of richly decorated crosses69, standards of gold and silver crosses,70 and copies of Qurʾān,71 which were captured and

67Al-Wāqidī refers to the Arabs as “the bearers of the Qurʾān” and “the people of the Qurʾān”, while he does not consider, it seems, the Byzantines as true Christians but frequently refers to them as “worshippers of the Cross”, “infidel worshipers of the Cross” and “people of atheism who are believing in the Cross”. [Al-Wāqidī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 63, 65, 136, 206, 221, 225, 234, 246, 256, 274, 301, 302]. Also, Ibn Aʾtham al-Kūfī frequently refers to the Arab-Byzantine wars as if they were between “the people of the Qurʾān” and “the infidels”. He presents the Arabs as true faithful who always recite verses from the Qurʾān, pray and supplicate to Allah (God) for victory, while the Byzantines, despite being carrying crosses and Bibles, are using to drink wine and play on the musical instruments: castanets, lutes and whistles. [Ibn Aʾtham al-Kūfī, Kitāb al-Futūḥ, I, pp.146, 148, 150, 189, 191, 263; II, p.126, 130]. The late historian Ibn Aybak ad-Dwādārī was still referring to the Byzantines as ‘worshippers of the Cross’. He refers to the Muslims' victory in Yarmūk battle by saying: “Allah insisted on supporting his religion and raising the word of His true believers over that of the worshipers of the Cross”. [Ibn Aybak, Kitāb al-Durar, III: Al-Dur al-Ṭamīn fi Aḥbār Sayed al-Mursalin wal-Ḥulfāʾ ar-Rasdīn], ed. M.Y. al-Din (Cairo, 1981), p.167.

68It is familiar in the Arabic sources that each Byzantine contingent is composed of 10,000 soldiers under a Cross and a leadership of a Patrikios. At the end of the battle of Agnādīn, the Emperor Heraclius sent “two crosses, and 10,000 soldiers under each of them”, he also sent before the battle of Faḥl (14635) “two crosses placed at the head of 20,000 soldiers and two Patrikoi”. [Ibn Aʾtham al-Kūfī, Kitāb al-Futūḥ, I, pp.150, 175]. In 291/903, the Byzantine Emperor "sent two crosses, under each of them 10000 soldiers, to raid on the borders". [Al-Ṭabari, Taʾriḥ al-rusul, 10: 116; Ibn al-Aṯir (d. 630/1232), al-Kāmil fi l-Tāriḥ, ed. M.Y. al-Daqāq (Beirut, 1987), 6: 423; Ibn Kaṭīr(d. 774/1372), al-Bidāyā wa l-Nihāya, ed. A.A. al-Turkī (Cairo, 1998), 14: 724].

69Arabic sources mention that the Arab army captured seven crosses of gold and silver, beside the Byzantine 'greatest cross' which was richly made of gold and decorated with priceless precious stones, during a battle near Ṭarsus in 270/883 [Al-Ṭabari, Taʾriḥ al-rusul, 9: 666; Ibn al-Aṯir, al-Kāmil, 6: 336; Al-Ḍahabī, Tāriḥ al-Islām, 20: 38; Ibn Kaṭīr, al-Bidāyā, 14: 586-587; Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Muntazam, 12: 229]. On the Byzantine side, sources refer to many crosses of gold and precious stones which were recovered by Nikephoros Phokas after capturing Tarsus in 965. These crosses are mentioned specifically as “military crosses” (stavroi strategikoi). Leo the Deacon, History, p.109; Skylitzes, Synopsis History, p.259. See also: J. Haldon, Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204 (London, 19990), p.22.

70Leo the Deacon records that Nikephoros Phokas' assault against Crete in 960 was preceded by a huge standard of the cross. Leo the Deacon, History, p.61. Constantine VII in his De Ceremonies stresses on the presence of a standard-bearer carrying a bejeweled gold cross in the front of the army. Constantine Porphyrogennetos, Book of
exchanged by both sides, are frequently revealed in the Arabic narratives of battles, diplomatic and captives' exchanges between them.

Within battlefields, the Byzantine familiar war cry was "Victory to the Cross"\(^{72}\), in opposite to the Muslim one "Allāhu Akbar" (God is the Greatest).\(^{73}\) Each of the two sides naturally heard the other's war cry and interpreted it, besides being an enthusiastic factor, as a calling for the support of a divine power. Al-Wāqidī frequently refers to richly decorated crosses of gold and precious stones that were usually given by the Byzantine Emperors, monks or priests to the generals to be placed at the head of the imperial armies as a divine power that would insure their victory.\(^{74}\) He also mentions many cases of Byzantine generals, and sometimes soldiers, who used to put such precious crosses on their heads or in necklaces.\(^{75}\) In one case, a Byzantine champion called Aṣṭfān (Stephen) had kissed and prayed to a cross of gold in his silver necklace.
before a single combat with a Muslim one called Ḍirār. Also, al-Wāqidī presents some cases in which the Byzantines resorted to place crosses on the walls of besieged cities for help and protection, the practice which would be attested later by a Greek account. According to Kaminiates, the defenders of Thessaloniki, when were besieged by an Arab fleet led by Leo of Tripoli in 904, placed crosses on the city's walls to defend them.

Among all crosses, the True Cross, as a relic attributed to the Christ himself, was the most important spiritual sacred object that could be used or carried by the Byzantine armies during battles. Constantine VII, to ensure victory before a military encounter with Sayf al-Dawlā, had sought the prayers of holy men and monks throughout the empire, and dispatched to the army 'holy water', which emanated from the most holy relics of Constantinople, above all the True Cross. Unfortunately, there is no Greek reference, as far as I know, on taking wood from this cross by the imperial armies in their Eastern campaigns, but this is very conceivable. In his dealing with the issue in the framework of the early Arab conquests, Walter Kaegi has similarly noted that "there are no significant episodes reported about efforts to use Christian relics to save

76 Al-Wāqidī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 81. On another example of a Byzantine General who kissed the cross and made it with his hand on his eyes before the fight, see: Ibid, 1: 278. The tradition of putting the Cross on the heads of the Byzantine soldiers was still known by the Arabs till late period. In 422/1030, one of the leaders of the Arab tribe, called Ḥasān b. al-Jarāḥ, rebelled against the Fatimid authorities in Syria and resorted to the Byzantines putting a cross on his head. In the same year, he appeared leading a Byzantine army against the Fatimid Syria carrying this cross on his head. Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441), ’Ittiʿāẓ al-Ḥunafāʾ bi Aḥbār al-Aʾimmah al-Faṭimyin al-Ḥulafāʾ, ed. G. al-Šayāl (Cairo, 1996), 2: 180.
77 Al-Wāqidī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 48, 93.
78 According to Kaminiates, "those who were manning the wall invoked the aid of the saving weapon of the cross against the enemy forces". Kaminiates, Capture of Thessaloniki, p.45.
79 "Behold that after drawing holy water from the immaculate and most sacred relics of the Passion of Christ our true God – from the precious wooden fragments [of the true cross] and the undefiled lance, the precious titulus, the wonder-working reed, the life-giving blood which flowed from His precious rib, the most sacred tunic, the holy swaddling clothes, the God-bearing winding sheet, and the other relics of His undefiled Passion – we have sent it to be sprinkled upon you, for you to be anointed by it and to garb yourself with the divine power from on high".McGeer, "Two Military Orations", p.133.
80 There is a reference clarifies the presence of such relic in the imperial eastern campaign of tenth century. In a military treatise of Constantine VII, he refers to a koubikoularios carrying "the holy and life-giving wood of the Cross" that should be present in the imperial reception's ceremonies when the emperor was passing through in the Eastern themata going on campaign. Constantine Porphyrogennetos, Book of Ceremonies, I: 485; Haldon, Three Treatises, p.125.
various towns from the Muslims", and has convincingly considered such silence as an expected matter, "perhaps because no one wanted to demonstrate the weakness of Christian relics". Nevertheless, Kaegi's hypothesis can be applied for the period of his study, but may not be appropriate for the later Arab-Byzantine military confrontations, particularly when dealing with the tenth century Byzantine military expansion in North Syria. Here, the Arabic evidence seems more helpful. Al-Wāqīḍī, in his frequent references to the Byzantine crosses that were carried during the early Arab conquests, distinguishes a piece cross that had been inherited among the monks of Amorion from the time of the Christ. One of these monks, who was having this piece in his necklace on the eve Yarmūk battle, gave it to a Byzantine champion before a single combat with a Muslim one. In another account, Emperor Heraclius (610-41), after losing most of Syria, sent an army under the leadership of the Domestikos Yūqanā (John) giving him a cross that "had been well-kept in the church, and which is forbidden to take out except in their great days".

Other Arabic pieces of evidence demonstrate both sides' use of other relics in their military encounters. Al-Wāqīḍī refers to a 'blessed cap' that was given by the Prophet to Ḥālid b. al-Walīd, who used to carry it during his battles with the Byzantines, and seemed believing in its power. In one of these battles, as one story tells, his defeat by the Byzantines seemed imminent because he had forgotten to take this "blessed cap". A knight suddenly appeared in the battlefield carrying it to Ḥālid. His soldiers had firstly thought that this knight should be an angel sent by the heaven, but later they discerned that he is Ḥālid's wife herself in guise of a male fighter.

Epic of Ḩā at al-Himma frequently refers to the Prophet's relics which early Abbasid caliphs used to carry during their expeditions against the Byzantines, specifically his cloak (burda), turban (ʿimāma), stake (qaḍīb) and sword (saīf). Also, it often presents the battles

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82 Al-Wāqīḍī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 289.
83 Al-Wāqīḍī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 384. According to the narrative, Heraclius advised him to place this cross at the head of his army and depend on it for victory.
84 Al-Wāqīḍī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 163-165. Arab tradition used to describe Ḥālid b. al-Walīd's characters and skills in terms of supernatural heroism. According to an Arabic legend, the Byzantines themselves ascribed Ḥālid's title Saīf Allah (God's sword) and his supernatural skills in battles to a sword that had been descended from the heavens to the Prophet, who gave it to Ḥālid. Ibn al-Aṯīr, al-Kāmil, 2: 260. Worth to be mentioned that Ḥālid's title was known among the Byzantines. Theophanes, Chronicle, p.466.
between both sides as if a "war of relics" in which each one used relics or counter-relics as trustworthy powers ensuring his victory. In one tale, the Byzantine Patriarch gave the General a piece of relic and advised him to made it with his hand over his soldiers' faces and heads in time of need, and thanks to it the Byzantines' victory seemed imminent. Logically, as the story reflects, the Byzantine General was confident in the divine power of such relic, but it is very striking to find the Arab narrator himself attributing to it the Byzantine superiority in the battle, the critical situation that required an intervention of a Muslim counter-relic.\footnote{Sīrat al-Amīra Ḍāṭ al-Himma, 1: 282-289. The Byzantine relic of this story is a piece of hoof that the writer attributed to 'the donkey' of the Christ, while the Muslim one is a copy of Qur'ān written by 'Āli b. Abī Ṭalib, and which Maslamā b. 'Abd el-Malik, who gave it to the Muslim leader of the battle, had inherited from his father. These relics seem to be legendary.}

Another tale relates a legendary episode of the Byzantines' capturing of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (170-93/786-809) together with the Prophet's relics, whose release required the intervention of the Muslim heroic figure al-Ṭabṭāl,\footnote{Abū Moḥammad al-Ṭabṭāl (d. 122/739) is one of the most popular heroic figures who were associated with fighting against the Byzantine, particularly in the late Arabic historiography. He was thought to be one of the main leaders who participated in Constantinople's siege of 717-18. As the Arab tradition goes, the Byzantines were humiliated by him in many battles and feared him to the extent that mothers used to stop their children's cries by scaring them off his name. Al-Ṭabarī, Taʿrīḫ al-rusul, 7: 88; Ibn Kaṭīr, Taʾrīḵ al-Islām, 7:406-410; Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1175), Taʾrīḵ Madānat Dimasq, ed. M.O. al-ʿAmrūī (Beirut, 1997), 33: 401-408.} who "feared that the Byzantines may destroy these relics to deprive Muslims from their blessed power".\footnote{Sīrat al-Amīra Ḍāṭ al-Himma, 2: 647-648.}

Despite the apparent legendary trait that is expected in tales of a heroic epic, the tradition of military utilizing of the Prophet's relics is attested in other Greek and Arabic historical accounts. As Theophanes records, Caliph Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr (136-58/754-75) resorted to the help of the staff and sandals of the Prophet against his enemies.\footnote{Theophanes, Chronicle, p.754.} Also, Leo the Deacon refers to messengers dispatched by Nickephoros Phokas to the Fatimid ruler of Africa al-Muʿizz (343-64/954-75) carrying as a gift the sword of Moḥammad, which he had taken as plunder from one of the fortresses he had captured in Syria.\footnote{As Leo the Deacon records, Nickephoros sent this embassy to demand the Patrikios Niketas, who had previously been taken prisoner at the time of the Byzantine defeat in Sicily and had been sent to al-Muʿizz. Leo the Deacon, History, pp. 126-127.} A variant of this tale is found in late Arabic narratives of thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. According to Ibn al-Aṯīr (d. 630/1232) and Ibn Kaṯīr (d. 774/1372), after the Byzantine defeat by the Fatimid forces in Sicily (at al-Magāz battle in 353/964), an
Indian sword was captured from the Byzantines, and sent to al-Muʿizz together with the other booty. The sword was bearing the following words: "this is an Indian sword used in fight between the hands of the Messenger of God (rasūlallah) for a long time".91

Various pieces of evidence also demonstrate that capturing and recovery of holy relics were not only a matter of wars, but sometimes a main goal of the two sides' diplomatic communications. Besides the abovementioned embassy of Nickephoros Phokas to al-Muʿizz, the fourteenth century historian Ibn Aybak ad-Dwādārī (d. 764/1362) records one of such communications which has an apparent legendary feature. According to him, news reached Caliph al-Mu'tasim that a blessed cloak of 'Umar b. Abd el-'Azīz, which miraculously cures all diseases, is preserved in a Byzantine monastery. Accordingly, the Caliph dispatched an envoy to the Byzantine Emperor to restore it. The later transmitted the demand to the monastery's Abbot, who refused yielding the cloak asking to be sent as an official envoy to negotiate with the Caliph. Finally, as the story goes, the Abbot went to Baghdad and could persuade al-Mu'tasim to leave the cloak in his monastery.92

As we can note, this story tries to reflect, at least from the Arabs' point of view, a Byzantine belief in a Muslim relic. Perhaps its legendary nature and its late narrator make it an unreliable story, but there is another more famous and well-documented account of a diplomatic communication that implies a similar respect for the other's relics, and the other this time is Christian.93 As the Arab tradition records, two years before capturing the mandylion of Edessa by the expedition of John Kourkouas against the city in 944,94 the Byzantine Emperor sent a letter

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91Ibn al-Aṯīr, al-Kāmil, 7: 285; Ibn Kaṯīr, al-Bidāyā, 15: 266. Alice-Mary Talbot might misunderstand the account, since she mentioned that: "Al-Aṯīr states that this was a sword 'often used in battles within sight of the Prophet Moḥammad,' not the Prophet's own sword." I think the Arabic text does not mean this, and most likely it is harmonious with Leo the Deacon's account which attributed this sword to the Prophet himself. Leo the Deacon, History, p.126 n.5.
93Exchange of relics, as a theme of Arab-Byzantine diplomatic communications, seems fascinating also the eastern Christian hagiographers. According to a legend recorded in the Life of St. Theodore of Edessa, Caliph al-Ma'mūn, now secretly a Christian with the baptismal name John, sent St. Theodore on an embassy to Constantinople to request a fragment of the True Cross. Michael and Theodora, who ruled jointly at that time, received the saint warmly and granted him the holy relic among other gifts. Swanson, M.N., "The Christian al-Ma'mūn Tradition", in: Christian at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq, ed. D. Thomas (Brill, 2003), pp.63-92, esp.74.
94According to the Greek account, the people of Edessa sent to the emperor Romanos I Lekapenos asking for the siege to be lifted, and promising to hand over the mandylion
(in 331/942) to Caliph al-Muttaqī (329-33/941-45) offering the release of all Arab captives in Byzantium in exchange with "a mandīl that ʿĪsā (Jesus) used to wipe his face with, and then his image imprinted on it". The Caliph seemed hesitant to take a single decision, or perhaps the mandylion was very important to both Eastern Christians and Muslims to the extent that he summoned the great statesmen, the fuqḥāʾ (theologians) and the quḍāh (judges) to help him in taking such decision. Some of them advised him that: "This mandīl is preserved in the church for a long time without being demanded by a king, and surrendering it (to the Byzantines) will be a blemish for Muslims, since they have the right in the mandīl of ʿIsā more than others". Undoubtedly, the whole account has an implication of Muslims' respect for a Christian sacred object.

Finally, there is another sort of sacred objects that was also sometimes present within the scene of Byzantine-Arab warfare, it is the icons. Theophanes Continuatus states that in 863, when the army of Michael III (842-67) was preparing to depart on a campaign against the Arabs, the patrikios Antigonos received advice from a certain monk named John to place the image of St. John on the shields of his troops to ensure God's aid in the battle. The painting of a saint's image on a Byzantine shield is also attested in an Arabic account of a fight between a Muslim champion and a Byzantine one.

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95According to Arabic sources, the ex-vizier ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā rejected this opinion. He thought that releasing all Muslim captives is a precious deal that cannot be refused. Finally, the Caliph adopted this opinion and sent his acceptance to the Byzantine Emperor. What happened later is not clear in Arabic accounts. Moḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Hamḍānī (d.521/1127), Takmilat Tārīḫ al-Ṭabarī, in: Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīḫ al-rusul, 11: 340; Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Muntazam, 14: 27; Ibn Kaḏr, al-Bidāyā, 15: 150; Al-Ḏahabī, Tārīḫ al-Islām, 25: 5. Other different account is recorded by Eastern Christian sources. As Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī recorded, while the Byzantine armies being near Nisibis in 331/942, they sent to the people of Edessa requesting the Mandylion, the latter transmitted the request to the Caliph, who accepted it after consulting his fellow men. Finally, an unlimited truce was concluded between the Byzantines and the people of Edessa, accordingly the Muslim captives were released and the Mandylion was carried to Constantinople in the same year. Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, Annales, ed. L. Cheikho (Beirut), pp.98-99. Bar Hebraeus adopted the Arabic account, but added that the Caliph gave the Mandylion to the Byzantine messengers and sent with them his own messengers to receive the Muslim captives. Bar Hebraeus, Tārīḫ Muḥtaşr ad-Diwal, ed. A. Șaḥḥānī al-Yasūʾi (Beirut, 1983), p.287; Idem, Chronographia, Arabic trans. I. Armaléh, Tārīḫ al-Zamān (Beirut, 2005), p.57.

96Theophanes Continuatus, Chronographia, pp.180-181.

97This account is recorded by D. Nicolle, and quoted by P.L. Grotowski, without defining its source. I did my best to find it, but in vain. Nicolle, D., Romano-Byzantine
Icons of the Theotokos, as the imagined supreme protector of Constantinople, are expected to be carried or placed at the front of Byzantine armies during their battles with the Arabs. Anthony Kaldellis has recently discussed a set of Byzantine chronicle stories about the military role of icons of the Theotokos from the Avars' siege of 626 to twelfth century, but he has overlooked reference to such role in the context of Byzantine-Arab warfare. Also, Paul Speck and Bissera Pentcheva have comprehensively discussed the role of the Theotokos during the Arab siege of Constantinople in 717-18, and both have debated over whether she appeared in person or there was a procession with the cross and her icon. What can be added here is an unnoted Arabic account that refers to carrying of Marian icons by the Byzantine armies during a very early stage of their military confrontation with the Arabs. According to al-Wāqidī, there were among the booty that the Arabs got after the defeat of the Byzantines before Ḣemṣ in 15/636 a great deal of "standards and silk dresses decorated with the image (ṣūrat) of Mary and ‘Īsā" that was sent to be sold among the Christians of Yemen.

The imagined military role of the Theotokos' icons is also stressed in the expulsion of the Arabs from Nicaea in Bithynia in 626. According to Theophanes, during a long siege of the city, its inhabitants supplicated to God and placed their 'venerable images' on the city's walls, including an icon of the Theotokos. Also, the Life of St. Barbarus presents the Byzantine soldiers raising the cross and the icon of the Theotokos during a battle in which they inflicted a heavy defeat on the Arabs. Finally, there is a Greek account recorded by Theophanes

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100 Al-Wāqidī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 140.

101 Theophanes, Chronicle, p.560.

Continuatus and Skylitzes implies an imagined direct intervention of an icon of the Theotokos in behalf of the Byzantines against the Arabs. According to it, in 878 the emir of Tarsus sent a letter "full of blasphemy" to Andrew the Scythian, a general of the Emperor Basil I, in which he insulted the Christ and his mother. Andrew, shedding many tears, hung the letter on the icon of the Theotokos and asked her help against this "insulting barbarian". Then he assembled his forces, marched out against Tarsus and achieved a remarkable victory. 

While this account reflects a very different Arab attitude opposite to the tolerated one which is cited above concerning the Christian relics, it also encounters other popular Arabic accounts that do not only present an Arab tolerated attitude toward icons, but may also imply a positive response to their imagined supernaturalism. The epic of Ḍāt al-Himma relates a tale of some Muslim merchants who, while walking one night near a Constantinopolitan church, were suddenly stopped by one of the church wall's images, which spoke and informed them that God sent it to incite them to release a faithful Muslim captive in Byzantium.

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103 Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur liber quo Vita Basilli imperatoris amplectitur, ed. & trans. I. Ševčenko (Berlin-Boston, 2011), p.181; Skylitzes, Synopsis History, pp.140-141. While the intervention of the Theotokos' icon here might be a direct reaction to an Arab's blasphemy, another account implies that this intervention sometimes turned to be against the Byzantines themselves when being iconoclast. According to Theophanes, during the Arab siege of Nicaea 626, a strator called Constantine, on seeing an icon of the Theotokos had been set up, picked up a stone and threw it at her. He broke the image and trampled upon it when it had fallen down. The next day, when the Arabs attacked the walls and battle was joined, that man was struck by a stone discharged from a siege engine, and his head was broken. This divine punishment was necessarily interpreted by Theophanes as "a just reward for his impiety". Theophanes, Chronicle, p.560.

104 According to al-Azraqī (d.250/864), after the conquest of Mecca in 8/629, the Prophet ordered his followers to destroy all images inside al-Ka’ba, including those of Ibrāhīm (Abraham) and Ismāʾīl, but he excluded an image of the Virgin Mary with her son. Al-Azraqī (d.250/864), Aḥbār Makka wāmā gāʾ fīhā min al-ʿĀṭār [= Geschicht und Beschreibung der Stadt Mekka], ed. F. Wüslenfeld (Leipzig, 1858), pp.111-113. Also, there is a famous legend in Arabic sources mentions that Emperor Heraclius had kept images of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jesus and Moḥammad, which he showed to an embassy sent by Caliph Abū Bakr to invite him to Islam. The most striking side in this legend is that the Muslim envoys recognized the image of the Prophet Moḥammad saying: "he is our Prophet as if he is alive". Ibn al-Faqqī al-Hamaḏānī, Muḥtasr Kitāb al-Buldān (= Compendium Libri Kitāb al-Boldān), ed. M.J. De Goeje (Brill, 1884), pp.142-143. For details see: El Cheikh, Byzantium, pp.52-53.

105 Sīrat al-Amīra Ḍāt al-Himma, 1: 359. Also, there is a famous legend in Arabic sources mentions that Emperor Heraclius had kept images of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jesus and Moḥammad, which he showed to an embassy sent by Caliph Abū Bakr to invite him to Islam. The most striking side in this legend is that
Magical objects:

While all the previous imagined powers have roots that stem from the religion itself, the popular imagination of both sides also created its own supernatural powers, some of them seem of a magical background. Besides the aforementioned 'blessed cap' of Ḫālid b. al-Walīd which was thought to bring his frequent victories over the Byzantines, other caps, that were imagined to have a magical power of curing the headache, appeared many times in the context of Arab-Byzantine diplomatic communications. According to al-Wāqidī, before Emperor Heraclius left Syria he had secretly written to Caliph ‘Omar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb (13-23/634-644) asking him a cure for a severe headache that he was suffering from. The Caliph sent to him a cap that could calm the pain as soon as wearing it. This cap was sent again by a later Byzantine Emperor to Caliph al-Mu'taṣim when he suffered from a similar headache on the eve of his capture of Amorion in 223/838.106 Also, late Arab historians refer to a similar cap that was sent by Emperor Leo III to Maslama b. 'Abd el-Malik when he was suffering from a hard headache during his long siege of Constantinople in 717-718. As the story tells, Maslama was still skeptical of this cap till he tested it on some horses and soldiers' heads.107

Arabic sources frequently refer to the Byzantines as people fond of magic, spells and talismans.108 But in contrary to this view, there is an absence of the role of magical objects as an imagined helpful military power in the Greek sources. The only available account that related to Byzantine-Arab warfare described magic as "the Devil's machinations" which deserved 'the divine wrath', and ascribed to it the reason of Pergamon's fall in the hands of Maslama b. 'Abd el-Malik in 716. As the legend tells, during Maslama's siege of the city, a magician instigated its inhabitants to take a pregnant who was about to give birth of her first child, cut her up, removed the infant from her, and boiled it in a pot of water, in which all those who were intending to fight dipped the sleeves

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the Muslim envoys recognized the image of the Prophet Mohammad saying: "he is our Prophet as if he is alive". Ibn al-Faqqīḥ al-Hamaḏānī, Muḥtaṣr Kitāb al-Buldān (= Compendium Libri Kitāb al-Boldān), ed. M.J. De Goeje (Brill, 1884), pp.142-143. For details see: El Cheikh, Byzantium, pp.52-53.

106 Al-Wāqidī, Futūḥ al-Ṣām, 1: 405-406.
of their right arms, and for this reason "their hands became incapable of taking up armies". 109

**Dreams, predictions and Divine Signs:**

Humans have an innate desire to gain knowledge of what the future has in store for them. The Arabs and the Byzantines were no different. They always believed in divine messages about their destiny that delivered from the heavenly powers to the earthly world through prophetic dreams, visions, predictions and divine signs. Such belief was frequently utilized as means of legitimization in various aspects of religious and political life. 110

In the early stage of Byzantine-Arab confrontation, Arab authors presented Emperor Heraclius as being expert in astrology and ascribed to him a series of dreams that predicted the emergence of Islam and its future expansion. 111 In the most famous of these dreams he saw a new conqueror of the world arising from amongst the circumcised. 112 Nadia El Cheikh has discussed this dream as "a means to establish the legitimacy of the Prophet Moḥammad's mission and to show that the Prophet's

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112 I think the story is worth to be quoted in full as follow: “Ibn An-Natur, the Governor of Ilya’ (Jerusalem), narrates that once while Heraclius was visiting Ilya’, he got up in the morning in a sad mood. Some of his priests asked him why he was in that mood. Heraclius, who was an astrologer, replied, ‘At night, during a dream, when I looked at the stars, I saw that the leader of those who practice circumcision had appeared and would become the conqueror. Who are they who practice circumcision?’ The people replied, ‘Except the Jews nobody practices circumcision, so you should not be afraid of them. Just issue orders to kill every Jew present in the country.’ While they were discussing it, a messenger, who had been sent by the king of Gassān to convey the news of Allah’s Apostle to Heraclius, was brought in. Having heard the news he (Heraclius) ordered the people to go and see whether the messenger of Gassān was circumcised. The people, after seeing him, told Heraclius that he was circumcised. Heraclius then asked him about the Arabs. The messenger replied, ‘Arabs also practice circumcision.’ (After hearing that) Heraclius remarked that sovereignty of the Arabs had appeared. Heraclius then wrote a letter to his friend in Rome who was as good as Heraclius in knowledge. Heraclius then left for Ḥems (a town in Syria), and stayed there until he received the reply of his letter from his friend who agreed with him in his opinion about the emergence of the Prophet and the fact that he was a Prophet." This story was firstly recorded by ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Ṣanʿanī (d. 211/827) [al-Muṣannaf, ed. H. al-A’zamī (Beirut, 1972), 5: 343] and al-Buḥārī (d.256/870) [Ṣaḥīḥ, al-Buḥārī (Damascus, 2002), p.11], both compilers of the Prophetic Ḥadīṯ, and then appeared in al-Ṭabarī (d.310/922), *Taʾrīḥ al-rusul*, 2: 646-647. The English translation of Hosein, I.N., *Dreams in Islam*, (New York, 1997). See also, El Cheikh, *Byzantium*, p.43.
appearance was anticipated as part of the divine plan". There is no Greek evidence, as far as I know, referring to the issue, but there is a Latin one that presents a striking parallel to the Arabic story. According to the mid-seventh century Merovingian chronicle of Fredgar, Heraclius discovered, through the practice of astrology, that "his empire was to be laid waste by circumcised races". Therefore, he ordered the baptizing of Jews throughout his empire, and sent to the Frankish king Dagobert requesting to do the same. This parallel led Benjamin Kedar to suggest a direct transmission of the story from the Orient to Gaul.

Whatever the validity of Kedar's hypothesis, which still need answers for many essential questions, this parallel extends to cover other Latin historical narratives. According to the Chronicle of 741, Heraclius warned his brother Theodore not to fight against the Saracens, for being expert in astrology he could foretell disaster. In the Chronicle of 754, Heraclius was forewarned through astrological prediction and a dream that "he would be ravaged mercilessly by rats from the desert". All these accounts and their dates, including the Arabic ones, may simply imply another different path of borrowing. Probably, the story originated in Gaul in the mid-seventh century, made its way to Spain before the mid-eighth century, and then was borrowed by the Arabs, sometime after their conquest of Spain in 711, to appear later in their sources from the first half of ninth century onwards, most likely to utilize it as a means of legitimization, and to do so, some rectifications were required. Later,

113 El Cheikh, Byzantium, p.43.
115 Kedar, Crusade and mission, pp.27-28. According to him, "Evidently the story originated in the East, sometime after the Arab conquests in the 630s, and made its way to Merovingian Gaul, where it was soon committed to writing, whereas in the Orient it continued as oral tradition for about two more centuries".
116 Kedar's hypothesis does not explain how the Arabic story was transmitted from Orient to the far Gaul during relatively few years, why it still unwritten in Arabic for about two centuries, despite being originated in the Orient, while was recorded as soon as it reached Gaul, and why the far Gaul not Byzantium, despite being the nearest.
119 For the same purpose, I think, a number of Byzantine monks and clerics was said to have divine visions and prophecies that predicted the conquest of Syria by the Arabs. According to al-Wāqidī, a Byzantine wise called Samʿān (Simeon), who was well-
the story of Heraclius' astrological prediction/dream and his decree of baptizing the Jews would appear again in the Eastern Christian sources, nearly as Fredgar narrated it without the Arab rectifications.  

As modern scholars have demonstrated, the most confusing question that confronted the Christians east and west, after unprecedented conquests that brought most of the former Christian Roman world, from Syria to Spain, under Muslim control, was "How can explain God’s apparent abandonment of his Christian Empire?". While the Arab conquest was interpreted as a divine punishment for Christians' sins, it was also associated with divine signs, perhaps to prove that God did not completely abandon His fellow people but sent these signs as a portent, or as a bad omen for sinners and those who did not follow the right path of God. Such signs, which appeared to Heraclius through astrology or dreams, were not entirely absent in the Greek sources. According to Theophanes, a sign, which "foreboded the Arab conquest", took the shape of sword and appeared for thirty days in the heavens of

aware of old books and prophecies, on seeing the Muslim armies under the leadership of Ḥālid b. al-Walīd in Syria, recognized the signs of its fall. Another Byzantine cleric was said to have visions of the Prophet Danyāl (Daniel) which had predicted the conquest. Al-Wāqidī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 43, 106. For other similar accounts, see: pp.130, 397-398.


Palestine. Also in 654, while Emperor Constans II (641-668) was laying with the imperial fleet at Phoinix in Lycia, before a sea battle with the Arabs, he saw in a dream that he was at Thessaloniki. Despite the fact that the dream was interpreted as a prediction for the Arabs’ victory, the Emperor ignored it and ordered the fleet to fight. Therefore, the outcome of the battle was a harsh defeat and escaping of the Emperor to Constantinople. However, as pieces of evidence demonstrate, the belief in such heavenly messages and the bad consequence of neglecting them sometimes left its impact on the Byzantine decisions of war, or at least on the popular interpretation of such decisions. On the eve of Dazimon battle (22 July 838), Theophilos refused the advice of his brother-in-law Theophobos, to take the Khurramites alone and attempt a night attack, for he had seen Theophobos in a dream as a conspirator against him. Also, there is a legend on the Byzantine reconquest of Crete took the form of prediction that whoever retook Crete would become emperor. This prediction was utilized by those who opposed the expedition planned by Emperor Romanos II (959-963) to scare him off the operation. Finally, Skylitzes has totally ignored the rain, the number of defenders, and the strong defenses when interpreting why Nikephoros II, after leading his army in northern Syria, suddenly left Antioch (in 22 October 968) without recapturing it, ascribing his withdrawal to a spread prediction that "the emperor would die at the same time Antioch was taken" and, as Skylitzes believes, "it was indeed because of that he did not approach it". On the Arab side, we cannot ignore the deep impact of the believing in Prophetic dreams and prophecies on the Muslim's perception of Jihād and on the soldiers' morale during battles against the Byzantines. The frequent failed attempts to capture Constantinople by

122 Theophanes, Chronicle, p.467.
123 Theophanes, Chronicle, p.482.
124 Here we may remember the abovementioned sever outcome of Constantine VII's expedition of 949 against Crete which was ascribed by the Hagiographer of St. Paul the Younger to his neglecting the saint's prediction about this failure (see note 47).
125 Genesios, On the Reigns, p.56.
126 Theophanes Continuatus, Chronographia, pp.474-475.
127 Skylitzes, Synopsis History, pp.260-261. Skylitzes, when recorded this prediction, was certainly aware that Nikephoros II had shortly been murdered (in 11 December 969) after his recapture of Antioch in 28 October 969.
Umayyad Caliphs can be partially interpreted in light of a variety of such prophecies which predicted the city's future fall in the Arabs' hands. Dreams and visions in particular were seen as a channel through which the living can personally meet the divine and receive messages about their destiny. The Prophet Moḥammad's tradition implies that while prophecy has ceased by his death, as being the Seal of the Prophets, messages of divine origin can still be communicated through dreams. Reading of al-Wāqidī, for example, gives a strong impression that dreams and visions were familiar means through which the Prophet was still transmitting his messages to Muslim generals and soldiers while fighting the Byzantines. According to him, the Prophet appeared in a dream to the Muslim leader Abū Úbayda inciting him to wake up and haste to help Ḫālid b. al-Walīd, who was at this moment surrounded by a huge Byzantine force. Another account relates the Prophet's appearance in a dream to Caliph ‘Omar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb at the same night of Yarmūk battle to announce him the good news of Muslims' victory.

Believing in the possibility of communication with the divine through dreams and visions was not unfamiliar for the Byzantine mentality. Here, we may not need to repeat the aforementioned


130 Siviri, S., "Dreaming Analyzed and Recorded: Dreams in the World of Medieval Islam", in: Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming, ed. D. Shulman & G.G. Stroumsa (New York- Oxford, 1999), pp.252-273, esp.252. Dreams are mentioned many times in the Prophetic Ḥadīṯ. According to it, "The veridical dream is one forty-sixth of prophecy", and "Whoever has seen me in a dream has truly seen me, for Satan cannot take my form". On dreams in a considerable number of the Prophet's Ḥadīṯ, see: Hosein, Dreams in Islam.

131 Al-Wāqidī, Futūḥ al-Šām, 1: 163.


133 Some scholars, judging by the number of dreams interpretation manuals, have suggested that dreams were less popular in the Christian world than in its Muslim counterpart. Sirriyeh, E., "Muslims Dreaming of Christians, Christians Dreaming of Muslims: Images from Medieval Dream Interpretation", Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations 17/2(2006), pp.207-221; Abouseada, "Supernatural Powers", p.120. In contrary to this view, Steven M. Oberhelman has recently emphasized the popularity of Dreams among the Byzantines. According to him, "the Church and State may have tried to control divination, but even patriarchs and emperors had to admit that dreams had a solid scriptural basis, and tradition and cultural lore insisted that throughout history God has sent prophetic visions and dreams to people whom He favors". Also, as Oberhelman has pointed out, there were dreambooks available to the Byzantines, and they were
chronicle and hagiographical stories that presented dreams as a bad omen through which a divine power, like the Theotokos, sent an alert message about a catastrophic outcome,\(^\text{134}\) or as a tool through which saints fulfilled their familiar tasks in releasing war captives and defending cities.\(^\text{135}\) However, the deep impact of believing in dreams on the Byzantine mentality may be manifested in the association of Dreams' interpreters with the armies of Emperor Constans II during the sea battle of Phoinix,\(^\text{136}\) or in a military treatise of Constantine VII that mentioned books of Dreams' interpretation and divination as being among the few books that an emperor should carry with him while on military campaigns.\(^\text{137}\) Finally, Emperor Leo VI (886-912) was certainly well-aware of the importance of utilizing such belief, particularly for raising his soldiers' morale, when he advised his generals that they should fabricate a dream in case of its absence. According to his *Taktika*: "You will make your soldiers stronger on the day of battle if you get up early and spread it about that you have had a dream ostensibly sent by God or by some holy power that urged you on attack the enemy and appeared in support of you".\(^\text{138}\)

**Conclusion:**

Legends and myths seem lacking a solid historicity, but they often, if not always, reflect the imagination, culture and ideas of the peoples who created them. As the recent study demonstrates, aside from the political rivalry, military confrontation and religious difference that were arose between the Byzantines and the Arabs; they shared a similar popular belief in the supernaturalism of the divine powers.

\(^{134}\)In the abovementioned story of the strator Constantine (see note 104), the Theotokos appeared in a dream to him before his catastrophic death by the Arabs, and warned him from such outcome as a divine punishment for his aggression against her icon. Theophanes, *Chronicle*, p.560.

\(^{135}\)As in the aforementioned case of the noble lady who envisioned St. Theodore Tiron defending Euchaïta against the Arab attack of 753/754 (see note 32).

\(^{136}\)Theophanes, *Chronicle*, p.482.


Arab-Byzantine warfare, and in less degree the diplomatic communications, seemed as a fertile field in which each side used and carried his own imagined supernatural powers in battles to secure his superiority over the other. As the categories of the recent study demonstrate, the two peoples shared a similar popular belief in the supernaturalism of holy men, angels, demons, sacred objects, dreams, visions and predictions. Both sides imagined holy men as liberators of captives and patrons of cities, and believed in their predictions before battles. Even in the case of an evil power, as demons, both believed in the possibility of turning it to be a "good" one and thus using it in his favor.

Polemic, and sometimes chronicles and hagiography, usually give the impression that each side criticized and completely rejected the other's belief in the miracles of these powers, but in contrary to this view, whose aim was to prove the superiority of one religion over the other, there is a plenty of evidence that draws a quietly different scene.

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