THE DECISIVE BATTLES IN THE ARAB CONQUEST OF SYRIA*

Moshe Sharon

INTRODUCTION

The conquest of Syria by the Arabs around the years 634–640 was no doubt a crucial historical event. True, the conquest of Iraq which took place concurrently with that of Syria was very important too, for it led to the disappearance of the Persian kingdom that had played an important role in world history for almost a thousand years. The conquest of Iraq also enabled young Islam to come into contact with the civilizations of central Asia, which enriched the Islamic culture with the heritage that lay outside the Judeo-Christian and Greek world. Nevertheless, the conquest of Syria was far more important, for it created within a very short time the nucleus of the Empire and opened up the Mediterranean basin for it: Syria became the heart of the Arab rule during the crystallization of the Islamic institutions. Moreover, there was nothing to separate it from the Arabian Peninsula, which enabled a continuous flow of Arabs into it. These Arabs were sent to new fronts in the north, southwest and southeast, widening the frontiers of the Empire, and contributing at the same time to the Arabicization of Syria, and later also of the other territories in the Mediterranean basin and elsewhere.

Damascus in Syria was the first true capital of the Islamic empire. From Damascus this empire was ruled by the Umayyad dynasty that institutionalized Islam at its very inception as an active force in history, and issued the plans and the orders for the continuation of the conquests. This dynasty was established during the conquest. According to all the existing accounts, members of the Umayyad family led the invading forces, established the administration in the occupied lands, headed it, and not surprisingly, also ascended the throne of the Caliphate. Only from Syria it was possible to maintain the unity of the Empire. In

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spite of many difficulties, only the Umayyad rule was able to hold together both the eastern and western provinces of the Empire. Thus a new political reality was created, unknown until then in human history, a reality in which the eastern and the southern parts of the Mediterranean basin, the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, and the lands to their east as far as central Asia, belonged to the same political body. Throughout history the Syrian Desert was a border region that always separated the great powers of East and West: Babylon and Egypt, the Persians and the Greeks, the Parthians and Rome, the Sassanids and Byzantium. The Mediterranean basin, except for short periods in history, was never part of the lands beyond the Syrian Desert. Under the Umayyads, the Syrian Desert had become a mediating agent between East and West, and at the same time it served as the connecting channel between the holiest sites of Islam in Mecca and Madinah and the political capital of the Empire in Damascus. In this way Spain on the one hand and the northwestern parts of India on the other could belong to the same state.

The decisive proof that only from Syria this unusual unity could be kept was supplied by the new situation that emerged after the center of the Empire moved to the Euphrates and Tigris valleys. Baghdad is the symbol of the change that occurred in the territorial and political character of the Islamic state, although the signs of this change appeared 13 years earlier, immediately after the fall of the Umayyad dynasty in 750. Already in that same year Spain left the Islamic Union, slowly followed by North Africa. One century later the Syrian Desert resumed its historical position as the separating region between the Islamic authorities which developed independently in the east and in the Mediterranean basin.

The political unity accorded by Syria to the young Islam was also of cultural significance as it afforded cultural supremacy based on Arabism. This Arabism did not prevent Islam from being eclectic. On the contrary, it drew freely on the cultural heritage of the Middle East: the vast reservoir of the ancient world, Hellenism, Judaism and Christianity; all of which were channelled through the Arabic language. Arabic remained the language of its culture even after Islamic political unity had been lost; however, the pure Arabism that was characteristic of the cultural creation initiated by Syria was replaced by cultural pluralism. This pluralism, in addition to representing an unusually prolific period within Islamic culture was also a reflection of political pluralism which replaced the Syrian original unity. The historian therefore, faces an interesting challenge when coming to discuss the birth of the Islamic Empire, and the part played by Syria in the process.

Almost all the scholars that studied this period have remarked on the easy conquest of Syria, and many reasons have been put forward to explain this. In particular the sources and research have noted the Muslim victories in the major decisive battles of the years 634–636. Muslim sources recognized the importance

of these battles and in particular the battle of the Yarmūk in 636 which resulted in Syria becoming free of the Byzantines and gaining the central position in the political and cultural map of Islam. The accounts of these decisive battles were inflated over the years, and by the time they were recorded in writing they had gained dimensions that befitted their historical significance. There was also a religious aspect involved in the description of these battles. The victory over the Byzantine armies, which in the eyes of the Arabs were the mightiest armies in the world, was attributed solely to Islam being the true religion and therefore deserving of God's active support.

Can we know what really happened in Syria in the third decade of the 7th century? Did the Muslims really face a mighty army? Was the conquest of Syria achieved after hard battles and a long campaign? These questions are prompted by the fact that a review of the Arabic sources and the descriptions of the battles in them make it clear that in most cases the Arab forces that invaded Syria did not encounter any real opposition. A closer reading of what happened in individual towns and regions reveals that the major part of Syria surrendered to the invaders and signed on *ṣulḥ* agreements (see below pp.16 f.). Moreover, it is absolutely clear from the sources that the Arab invaders, most of whom were Bedouins, had no idea whatsoever of how to conduct siege warfare and certainly did not possess the equipment to do so. The famous story of the Muslim general Khālid b. al-Walīd, standing outside the walls of Damascus and borrowing a ladder from a local monastery[1] may be nothing more than an amusing tale but it reflects a reality that logically must have existed during the Arab invasion of Syria. The historian is not allowed to evaluate historical facts by saying "what if," however, supposing for a moment that faced with the assault of the desert nomads, the Syrian cities had closed their gates, would then the conquest of Syria have been so easy? The fact remains that even relatively simple fortifications prevented them from conquering settlements, as we see in the story of the Prophet's *khandaq* in Madinah, where a trench and a few mounds of earth hastily prepared, were sufficient to halt the Bedouin attackers in their tracks. If so, they certainly did not possess the ability to conquer fortified cities whose walls could withstand siege machines. It seems, therefore, that Damascus, the central cities of Syria, Jerusalem and the other great fortified cities were never actually besieged. Only Caesarea is described as having been besieged for many years before it was conquered, but the source also relates that it was defended by almost one million men, and this number places the whole story in the realm of legend. Sufficient to say that no city was destroyed by fire or otherwise in the war or as a direct result of its conquest. The withering away of agriculture and of many of the cities and villages on the edge of the desert (for example all the towns of the Negev and its agricultural

settlements) began more than three generations after the Muslim conquest, as I showed many years ago.[2]

We learn from all the Arab sources that the majority of the settled areas of Syria were transferred to Arab hands without any armed struggle or in the terminology of the Muslim jurists there was hardly one Syrian city that was conquered, *ʿanwatan*, that is to say by force, even if we find legal sophistry that tries to establish ownership of certain lands by defining them as lands conquered as a result of war. I assume that Caesarea, like Jerusalem, surrendered after it had ceased to function as the administrative centre of Byzantium in the Holy Land and when it became clear to the Byzantines that there was no longer any point in protecting it after the whole of Syria had been lost. Because of its focal position as the symbol of Byzantine rule, the "conquest" of Caesarea is embellished with legends but surprisingly not with tales of bravery; for, as far as I could discover, throughout the siege which, according to the Arab sources, lasted no less than seven years, not one Muslim was hurt.

In the end it is said that Caesarea was conquered by means of a stratagem based on the treachery of one of its citizens, a Jew. This story was written about two hundred years after the events and should not be regarded as proof of Jewish-Muslim collaboration during the conquest but rather as an expression of the stereotype of the Jew as a traitor; in this case a traitor from whom the Muslims derived benefit.[3]

AN EASY CONQUEST OR DESTRUCTION AND DEVASTATION

In the context of what has just been said it is essential to pay attention to the information contained in the non-Arabic sources that describe destruction and devastation that the conquerors brought with them. The testimony of Sophronius, the patriarch of Jerusalem, is of particular importance. In his Synodic epistle in the year 634 he expresses the hope and prays that God would grant power to the emperor "to break the barbarian arrogance and above all that of the Saracens who, because of our sins unexpectedly rose against us with their cruel and bestial mode of thinking and their evil and heretical impudence, and ransacked everything." These words reflect total faith in the Emperor's ability to halt the Arab invasion. Sophronius gives no details about the invasion itself or of its repercussions, except for a general remark about the Arabs "ransacking everything."[4] However, in the course of that year, or perhaps sometime later, when the ineffectiveness of the imperial army in direct combat with the invaders became apparent, and when it became clear that this was not one of the familiar Bedouin incursions but a military operation with all the characteristics of a war of conquest, Sophronius's tone changed. His words echo despair. In his Theophany sermon delivered in 637

or probably even before he describes with anguish the destruction inflicted by the invaders:

> What has caused the invasions of the barbarians to multiply, and the legions of the Arabs to rise against us …? Why is the flow of blood continuous and why are the corpses the prey of the birds of the sky? Why are the churches destroyed and the Cross profaned? The abomination of the destruction was foretold by the prophet: the Saracens are overrunning the lands that were forbidden to them; sacking the cities; laying waste to the fields; surrendering villages to flames; demolishing the sacred monasteries. They resist the Roman armies, carrying off the spoils of war, adding victory to victory, aligning themselves against us and boasting that they will conquer the entire world.[5]

The difference between Sophronius's two testimonies is striking both in content and spirit. In his sermon he speaks of the destruction of cities, villages and monasteries emphasizing the defeat of the imperial armies, sees the destruction as the fulfillment of the words of prophecy, and describes other atrocities of the Arab invaders. In contrast to this, in his Synodic epistle the patriarch had predicted that the imperial armies, with God's help, would put an end to the Arabs' arrogance and would crush and humiliate them in front of the Emperor as they had done in the past.[6] The testimony of Sophronius is an eyewitness account. True there are other testimonies to the destruction and suppression of the Saracens but these were written two or more generations after the conquest. For example in the Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse written approximately in 690 or 691 we read about the destruction of agriculture by the Arabs as part of a detailed description of the oppression of the occupied population. Parallel descriptions can be found in the Jewish *Midrashic* literature[7] but these suffer from two weaknesses. Firstly, the Syriac apocalyptic vision of Pseudo-Methodius relates to the time of the writer and is a post factum prophecy and the same goes for the Jewish Midrashim. Secondly, in the Jewish Midrashic sources there is a positive side alongside the negative description of the Arabs, who "will measure the land with ropes and turn the graveyards into pastures." They will "rebuild the destroyed cities, clear the highways, plant gardens and orchards and mend the breaches in the walls of the Temple."[8] This midrash is based on a much earlier one, *Nistarot de Rabbi Shimᶜon bar Yoḥay*, which was written close to the rise of the Abbasids in 750. It views the appearance of Islam in a positive light and sees it as the source of salvation to the Israel and as the beginning of the Jewish redemption.[9] It is not possible, therefore, to learn anything about the Arab conquest from the Apocalyptic visions or the *Midrashim*. They give a contemporary account of the destruction of cultivated lands that had already begun between the end of the 7th and the middle of the 8th century in different parts of Syria and Iraq, and were not the direct outcome of the conquest.

We remain therefore with Sophronius's testimony which should be given consideration, but treated with a large degree of circumspection. Sophronius was

witness to the new situation where Bedouins and their flocks scattered all over the environs of Jerusalem; even the journey to nearby Bethlehem was fraught with danger. His sermon was perhaps one final plea to the Emperor to come to the aid of the Holy Land in repulsing the nomad invaders. He painted such a somber picture of the destruction in general, and that of the monasteries in particular, in the hope that if all else failed, the profanation of Christian sacred institutions would succeed in moving him. Agriculture is the first victim of Bedouin incursions because the invaders, coming with their huge flocks of goat and camels wreak havoc on every piece of open land. However, it appears that the Umayyad leadership swiftly took control and the damage inflicted on the agricultural settlements and on the larger cities was minimal. The inherent message of Sophronius's sermon is that there was no real military power available to check the invaders, and that they scattered freely wherever they could reach. As it had always happened the weakness or the lack of a strong central authority calls for the encroachment of the desert. The earliest available Syrian sources written by Monophysite priests convey a very different picture. The Muslim invasion is seen as the just punishment of the Byzantine authorities and the official Chalcedonian Orthodox Church, and as an act of salvation for the Monophysite Christians. Thus the attitude of the Syrian Monophysites to conquest was similar to that of the Jews, as can be learnt from the *Nistarot* of Rabbi Shimʿon bar Yoḥay where we read: "The Holy One, Blessed be He does not bring forth the kingdom of Ishmael only in order to save you from this wicked one."[10] A Syrian source describing the suffering of the Monophysites at the hands of the Byzantine authorities and the official Church says: "Because of this, the Lord of Vengeance, the Ruler over the earthly human kingdom and Who giveth it to whomever He willeth ... brought the Ishmaelites from the Land of the South – the most detestable and worthless of all the peoples on the surface of the earth – to secure our salvation through them."[11] We find a similar view expressed by the heads of the Nestorian Church in Persia.[12] In fact the great majority of the non-Arabic sources agree with the Arabic sources that emphasized the fact that the Islamic invasion was regarded as salvation for the persecuted Monophysite Church in Syria and that the invaders were actually welcomed, as we shall soon see. It is also important to point out that by the time the invasion began, many parts of Syria had already been Arabicized and many names of clergymen of the Syrian Church were Arab names, which means that the invaders were not really "newcomers."[13]

The thesis that I am going to propose says that following the great Byzantine-Persian war of the first three decades of the 7th century, the political and military situation changed dramatically. In addition to the surge of anti-Byzantine sentiments, there was no significant Byzantine military presence in Syria.[14] In 633, the year of the beginning of the Muslim invasion, the old Byzantine defense systems

in Syria had not yet been reorganized. The Byzantine army was far too small, dispersed, and occupied on other fronts, trying to check the Slavic and Avar invasions from the north that threatened the capital itself. In the few encounters between the Byzantine regulars and the invading Arabs, the forces involved were rather small. The Muslim historians, however, turned these encounters into giant battles involving tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of fighters. Needless to say, battles involving numbers of such magnitude were impossible in the Middle Ages. It is exactly this type of fantastic description in the Arabic sources that caused Ibn Khaldūn to write:

> Many historians ... strayed from the path of truth, and were lost in the desert of imagination and error, especially with regard to estimating numbers such as sums of money or the size of military forces, whenever these numbers appear in their stories they constitute weak points in which one can expect lies and idle talk, for which reason they must be brought down to their principles and examined against the rules of reason.[15]

I shall also show that, over the course of time, most of the details concerning the conquests in general and the conquest of Syria in particular, were forgotten. They were reconstructed at least one century after the actual occupation. Historians and traditionalists from various places, wishing to supply Islam with an orderly imperial history, inserted the necessary details into the general framework of this history. They described the orderly movement of a regular army; columns of military units advancing according to a preconceived plan following well studied strategy, and applying tactics that were issued from one centre. This orderly picture gleaned from the sources represents on the one hand the imagination of the medieval Arabic sources, putting into some order the multitudes of stories which accumulated during the century, century and a half, after the events, and the modern historians' notion of modern warfare. They all agree that one centre controlled the planning of the battles and issued detailed orders to one joint command of the army that accordingly conducted a few major and decisive battles which decided the fate of the whole war and established the firm foundations of the Islamic empire. However, what became known as the "decisive battles" about which clear, accurate and more-or-less generally accepted information should have existed is the source of controversy. There is no agreement among the Arab writers about their locations or about their dates. There is much confusion, in particular, between the battles of Ajnādayn and the Yarmūk, and what is especially surprising is the complete lack of clarity as to the exact site of Ajnādayn where, according to all the available sources, the first decisive battle took place.

BACKGROUND

The Byzantine military system in Syria was organized mainly to protect the sedentary areas against the Bedouin desert dwellers. It had very little to do with the war against the Sassanids, the bitter enemies of the Empire. This system was composed of their regular legions of a mobile central army under the Emperor the *Comitatenses* and of a chain of military fortified settlements on the edge of the desert inhabited by hereditary soldier-farmers called *Limitanei*. This chain of settlements was the Limes, the desert borderline. It is difficult to assess exactly the military value of these settlements, as the successive generations of these soldiers naturally must have lost much of their military prowess which was mollified by their peasantry. However, since the Roman army was on the whole constructed of infantry mercenaries, fighting according to fixed battle theories, it had become slowly outdated, especially when it had to fight against barbarian cavalry or confront war tactics that had not been determined in the war textbooks. In such cases the solution was to hire barbarians to fight other barbarians. Since the time of Theodosius I (379–395) we encounter barbarian horsemen in the Byzantine army. They were soon called *Faederati*. In the 6th century, under Emperor Justinian, their number was rather limited, however, they were an integral part of the army, and Justinian owed to them many of his victories.[16]

On the border areas of the Syrian Desert the Roman-Byzantine army relied on auxiliaries of various kinds that were recruited from the desert dwellers such as camel riders and horsemen, as well as on vassal "states" able to defend the settled regions against the incursions of the desert dwellers.

This was a sort of *faederati* in which a whole state was recruited to act as an auxiliary force. By using the term "state" in this context I mean a group of tribes that were held together by notables from a particular noble family, a "royal family," whose leaders were called *mulūk* – kings – and in the Arabic literature they are designated as the Kings of Syria – *mulūk ash-shām*. As buffer states that supplied the Byzantines with auxiliary forces they received annual payments from the imperial treasury.

Walter Kaegi describes very concisely the security arrangement in Syria and Palestine:

> It is questionable whether the Limes Palestinae ever existed in the form that some have claimed; consequently it is inappropriate to hypothesize its abandonment or survival until the 630s. Instead, it is better to assume continuation of some very old troop emplacements in the coastal areas, but very heavy reliance on friendly Arabs in encampments on the settled fringes of semi-desert, especially in southern Palestine, the Wādī'l Mūjib region, the Balqā', the Ḥawrān, the Golan, and even in upper Mesopotamia and near the Euphrates on the Syrian bank. Fiscal considerations

> reinforced a Byzantine wariness about trying to fight Arabs in their own terrain, to result in reliance on Arabs to guard the edges of settled territory against hostile Arabs.[17]

In the last two centuries of the Byzantine rule the Kingdom of Banū Ghassān (*al-ghasāsinah*) played a special role in the history of the region. The name Banū Ghassān was given to a group of Arab tribes or, more accurately, to the leading tribe of a group of tribes in Syrian Desert for whom the genealogists arranged a genealogical tree that connected them to Yemen. It is clear that the stories told about them in the Arabic literature are almost completely legendary. However, it is possible to glean some material from the legends and the semi legendary material, as well as from Greek and Syriac sources which reveal a picture of a "kingdom" that undoubtedly was connected with the commerce that passed along the Spice Route, though not on a large scale,[18] in addition to its major function as a buffer state between the nomads of the desert and the cultivated land. From this point of view the Ghassānids were an integral part of the Byzantine strategic system. Nominally at least, they were subordinate to the Byzantines, but in truth its leaders enjoyed much respect and a large measure of independence. The Ghassānid kings from the family of Jafnah whom the Arabic sources call *mulūk ash-shām*,[19] received the very high imperial honorific titles of Phylarch and Patricius, the latter being second to the Emperor himself. They were welcome guests at the imperial court in addition to annual payment, which they received as the protectors of the eastern desert border of the Empire.[20] From time to time they even took part in the wars between the Byzantines and the Sassanids.[21]

The Ghassānids did not establish towns and did not live in towns.[22] They became acquainted intimately with the Byzantine administrative system, with the legal system, and particularly with Christianity. They and the other tribes in the Syrian Desert were exposed to an intensive missionary activity of the Church and converted into Christianity most probably in its Monophysite (Jacobite) form. It is not clear what the nature of this Christianity was, and how deep it penetrated into the society. However, in spite of the fact that this form of Christianity was regarded heretical by the official church, it did not influence the faederati relationship between the three major tribes of the Syrian Desert Lakhm, Judhām and ʿĀmilah and the Empire. These tribes, that roamed the southern Syrian Desert, sometimes came under Ghassānid influence, and sometimes followed an independent policy. It all depended on the power exercised by the Ghassānid kingdom and its leaders. Some sources report that parts of the tribe of Judhām (a south Arabian tribe according to the genealogy given to it) were Jews; and there are some Muslim scholars who go as far as connecting the origin of the Jews of Madinah with these Judhāmic "Jews,"[23] although it is impossible to know what kind of "Jewishness" it actually was. This question is particularly significant as far as the Arabic

sources are concerned. For when these sources speak about "Jews" who lived centuries before they were compiled it is very difficult to know what they actually mean; and it is almost sure that they read into the past their information about the Jews of their time (especially those of Iraq and Palestine), and it is possible also that they put the blame of "Jewishness" on this or other tribe or on certain individuals in order to insult, or even harm them.

Here I wish to deviate for a moment from the main subject to make a short observation about the "Jewish tribes" in northern Arabia, more accurately in the town of Yathrib (later al-Madīnah) and its environs. The fact that the Qur'ān says that the Jews "say the ʿUzayr is the son of Allah"[24] raises grave doubts about the identity of those "Jews." It is very possible that Muḥammad was referring to groups of believers who called Jesus in Hebrew *ʿOzer*. This Hebrew word can be transliterated in Arabic only as ʿUzayr (the vowel *e* becomes the diphthong *ay* and the vowel *o* becomes *u*). In that particular verse Muḥammad emphasizes that the Christians say that *"masīḥ"* is the "son of Allah" and the "Jews" say that he is "*ʿuzayr*." In other words the Prophet refers here to a controversy between two groups, apparently of Arab tribes, who believed in the Sonship of Jesus but, as Muḥammad understood, disagreed about his name or title: should he be called *Masīḥ* namely, Messiah or should he be called Saviour or Helper – *ʿOzer*. Those who adhered to the name *ʿOzer* called themselves (or were called by others) "Yahūd" and those who called him *Masīḥ* were *Naṣārā* – Christians. It is not surprising that in the Jewish sources of the time there is no reference to these Jews who accepted the divine origin of Jesus, and were involved in a heated debate about his title whether to call him *Soter (ʿOzer)* or to call him *Christos (Masīḥ)*. Because these were, at any rate, times of great controversy in the Church about the nature of Jesus, it is possible that this inter-Christian debate represents the spirit of the time, which Muḥammad witnessed but did not care to investigate.[25]

Coming back to our main topic, it is evident that under the Ghassānid protection and due to the presence of the Byzantine army and its auxiliary units the settlement of Trans-Jordan from Buṣrā in the north to Eilat (Aylah) in the south, flourished. Eilat was also an important port in the Northeastern end of the Red Sea, and an important station on the Spice Route from South Arabia. It had a very active and coherent Christian community well organized around an efficient local Church establishment. To the north of Eilat there were many villages that enjoyed the protection of the Limes Arabia whose fortresses were built from Eilat northwards in a shape of two horns, one on the east and one on the west, reaching the Dead Sea and the Arnon River (Wādī Mūjib).[26]

THE PERSIAN CONQUEST AND ITS AFTERMATH

The security conditions changed dramatically after the great Persian invasion of Syria and Palestine as well as the conquest of Jerusalem in 614. True, the Persians occupied Jerusalem and the major centres of the Byzantine administration in Syria, but they were unable to control the Limes Arabia; they could not secure the Ghassānid cooperation, and it is doubtful whether they had any ability to impose their rule and administration beyond the main urban centres.[27] The Spice-Route that had served the Byzantines, ceased to operate as an international commerce artery although the local trade continued, since the Arab merchants had not been involved in the quarrel between the two super-powers. The local population in Trans-Jordan as well as in the Negev, continued to exist under the new rule. From the remnants of the main Byzantine cities in the Negev – Nessana, Oboda, Sobata (Subeita) Mamphsis, (Mamshit Kurnub) and others, as well as from the important written material found at the archives of Nessana it is clear that the Church played a vital administrative role in them. The great and graceful basilicas that were discovered in these towns are in themselves sufficient evidence to the strength of the Church even in the arid and semi-arid areas. They also supply good evidence to the fact that once the direct rule of the Empire – be it the Byzantine or the Persian – diminished, the Church stepped in and replaced the imperial administrative bodies. Enjoying high spiritual prestige, and drawing from it the authority to operate the administrative and economic apparatus, it emerged as the only organized body that could take care of the various needs of the population. But there was one thing the Church could not secure – protection against attack. However, the clergy even in this regard could employ its diplomatic talents and achieve some degree of security for its communities.

Once the border communities were left on their own, without the direct protection of the Empire, they were compelled to look after their own security employing the traditional system of "protection" used for countless generations by oasis dwellers. Every village or group of villages put itself under the protection of the head of a strong tribe in return of a fixed payment either in money or in kind. These protection agreements were called *ṣulḥ*. There are no details about such *ṣulḥ* agreement from the short Persian period, but from the sources about the same agreements a few years later it is possible to infer that these kind of arrangements existed earlier too (as they have continued to operate until modern times under the name "*khuwwah.*" See Alois Musil, *Northern Neğd.* American Geographical Society, NewYork 1928, pp. 256–257).

The Persian rule lasted fourteen years. In 627 or 628 Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor won a great victory over the Persians near Nineveh, and as a result he

could renew his rule in the Syrian territories which had been taken by the Persians. Nominally, therefore, it is possible to say that the situation returned to what it had been before the Persian occupation; but in reality this was not the case at all. Although the long war against the Persians ended in victory it had nevertheless exhausted the Byzantines and stretched their resources to the utmost. Their treasury was empty, and the frequent Slavic incursions and those of the Avars[28] over the Danube endangered the capital Constantinople itself. In these conditions the Byzantines were not in a position to reactivate even partially the fortresses of Limes Arabia. They did not have enough money even to pay their reduced number of mercenaries let alone the Bedouin auxiliaries and their traditional Ghassānid allies. The latter did not forsake their Christian affiliation but neither they nor the other Bedouins felt obliged to contribute free of charge, to the strategic system of the Empire. On the eve of the Arab invasion, therefore, the desert border of Syria was fully exposed. It should be emphasized that the abolition of the subsidies to the Bedouin "faederati" did not represent any particular policy against them after the Persian wars. It was part of a fiscal policy aimed at cutting the expenditures of the Empire that involved the reduction of payments to the soldiers in general.[29]

The Byzantines did not have enough time to reorganize their military and administrative systems in the Syrian territories before the beginning of the Arab invasion. Only on 21 March 630, Heraclius returned to Jerusalem the remnants of the Holy Cross that had been removed to Ctesiphon by the Persians some sixteen years earlier. The glorious procession of the Emperor in the Holy City marked the return of the Empire, but this was more of a symbolical act than real establishment of the Empire's rule. It is possible that during the time of his visit to Jerusalem, Heraclius was accompanied by some military units but even if some of them were sent to the other side of the Jordan, and to the desert areas to the south of the Dead Sea, they did not remain there, and the Limes Arabia was never reactivated. Most of the military power that had accompanied the Emperor left with him. He needed them in the capital, on the Danube in what remained of the fortifications which had been broken through by the Avars, and on the Persian border: along the upper Euphrates and in Byzantine Armenia. In spite of the victory at Nineveh the Persian danger was always present.

In Palestine, small army units remained along the coast in key positions next to Sergius the Governor who sat in Caesarea, the provincial capital. When the Bedouins, who had been denied subsidies, realized that the soldiers did receive their salaries they rebelled, attacked units of the regular army, and entirely exposed all the approaches into Palestine from the south.[30]

Kaegi concisely described the state of affairs in Syria and Palestine during the short interim period between the end of the Persian presence and the Arab

invasion; this was the reality against which the successes of the Muslim armies should be examined. In his analysis Kaegi writes:

> Islamic tribesman did not simply overrun a static and gravely weakened Byzantine Empire. Instead, their invasions occurred while Byzantium was still in the process of restoring her authority over the full extent of the former eastern borders of the empire. Heraclius was in that region because he was personally involved in overseeing that restoration and reunification. If he had had more time, he might have succeeded. The Muslim invasion caught him and the empire off-balance at a very awkward time, and kept them off-balance. The exertion of minimal pressure at the critical moment and place was able to bring the Muslims maximal rewards in terms of military victories and territorial conquests, with a minimum of casualties. The Byzantines were just restoring their authority in the Syrian cities and countryside, but that process of restoration and creation of lines of authority and a viable power structure with conscious identification with Byzantium was even more tenuous in the area east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea when the Muslims began their own probes and raiding, which they very soon greatly intensified.[31]

EARLY CONTACTS BETWEEN ISLAM AND TRANS-JORDAN

While this was the state of affairs on the Byzantine side, in northern Arabia the Prophet had been establishing himself as a great leader. Between 622 and 632, the year of his death, he created there a new political entity. The conquest of Mecca in 630, and a decisive victory over his last enemies in the same year made him the strongest political leader in the region in addition to his most prestigious role as the Messenger of Allah and the creator of a new religion. Until 630, Muḥammad concentrated his efforts on consolidating his hold on the immediate territories that had come under his hegemony, and widening the circle of his believers in the more distant ones that were less accessive to his direct control. He also had to fight against other prophets that had appeared in northern Arabia, and endangered the exclusivity which he had demanded for his message. But Muḥammad also had plans to widen his territorial domains and influence to southern Syria in general.

The area between the Dead Sea and Eilat (Aylah), which had been well known to the Arabs of the Ḥijāz long before the Prophet's time, was particularly promising. This was a relatively rich and poorly defended region. The Persians, even during their fourteen years of presence in Syria, never reached it, and the Byzantines although victorious, as we have seen, had neither the time nor the resources to reestablish in it the classical defense system of the Limes Arabia. A sudden, quick raid to the area of the Zered River (Wādī al-Ḥasā) could be very profitable, and without the hazard of confronting any Byzantine regulars. This was a twilight time, a time of uncertainty, and settlements on the verge of the desert seemed defenseless, vulnerable and tempting.

This was particularly true for the year 628, the year of the great victory of Heraclius over the Sassanids. A vacuum was created in that year, which the Prophet was well aware of, and decided to exploit. Exactly then he badly needed an impressive military success. The Arabic sources report that in March of that year or there abouts, he signed at Ḥudaybiyyah a truce agreement with Mecca. By all standards, it could be regarded as an important political achievement. However, this is not how the general Arabic public regarded the agreement. The sources contain more than hints to criticism. Doubts regarding the Prophet's decision that were voiced even among the closer circle of his disciples. Since he was the Prophet why was it that his status had not been recognized in the *hudnah* agreement signed with Quraysh?[32] How could the Prophet agree to a few clauses that seemed clearly humiliating? To add injury to insult, Bedouins that belonged to the Ghassānid sphere of influence murdered a messenger whom he had sent at about the same time to Buṣrā in the Ḥawrān (Ḥurān).[33] He used this event, as a pretext to send a raiding party into the Syrian territories of the Empire, which had been feared and venerated by all.[34] A quick victory would more than balance the humiliation of Ḥudaybiyyah and revenge the blood of the envoy.

The Arabic sources, composed more than 120 years after the event should be treated very carefully, as we shall later see. The story went through many mouths, and was embellished on the one hand, and modified on the other, in order to clear the Prophet from direct responsibility for the raid. However, the main outline of the operation can be reconstructed. Most of the sources speak about an invading force of 3,000 warriors.[35] In the terms of those days it was a large army. But as we have already indicated, it should be remembered that not only numbers of soldiers, but numbers in general, which appear in the Arabic sources should not be taken at face value. All that the story tries to say is that it seemed a large raiding party until it met the enemy. The Muslim tradition line-up against the Muslim raiders no less than 100,000 Byzantine soldiers, a ratio of about 35 to 1. But this was not all, this huge Byzantine army was also helped by its faederati from the tribes of Lakhm, Judhām, al-Qayn, Bahrā Wāʾil, and Balī that numbered all together another 100,000, and all this huge army of one fifth of a million was commanded by no less than the Emperor himself.[36] The story, repeated by many storytellers, should not be taken too seriously. After all the storytellers are not obliged to know the exact facts, for instance that the Emperor was far away from Syria, and began to clear his army from Persia, after his victory, only in April of 628. He came to Palestine two years later in 630.[37] In Trans-Jordan there was not even one Byzantine soldier, let alone "100,000" more than the whole Byzantine army before the war. (Some of these facts reflect, however, in Wāqidī's tradtions.)

The traditions go on to say that two close members of the Prophet's family led the raid: the commander was his foster son Zayd b. Ḥārithah, and his deputy

was Jaᶜfar b. Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's first cousin. The raiding party, following the Spice-Route, managed to reach the village of Muʾtah to the south east of the Dead Sea, but there waited for them the local Bedouins of the Ghassānids, in whose territories the village was situated, and drove them back causing them heavy casualties. This was a typical war between tribes on control of territory and resources. And had it not involved the Prophet, it would have been remembered, at best, as one more story in the repertoire of *ayyām al-ᶜarab* legends. The story found its way unto the *Sīrah*, and as such it became part of the Islamic *Heiligen Geschichte*. The raid therefore gave birth to martyrs and to heroes, which Islam placed in its pantheon.

Khālid b. al-Walīd, a young and talented commander, a relatively neophyte Muslim, who according to the stories of the "*Riddah*" distinguished himself in these early battles, managed to organize the beaten expedition in Muʾtah, and bring most the force home safely. Zayd b. Ḥāritha and Jaᶜfar b. Abī Ṭālib both died in battle. The tradition, both Shīᶜite and Sunnī, embellished the latter's figure to such a degree that it is impossible to separate legend from truth. However, one cannot deny that the legend is moving: Jaᶜfar, holding the standard lost one hand, raised the standard with the other, lost this one too and was killed, defenseless. Later the Prophet assured the believers that in Heaven Jaᶜfar was given two wings instead of his hands. Since then, this cousin-martyr of the Prophet is known as "Jaᶜfar the Flier" (*aṭ-ṭayyār*). Wāqidī, *ibid*., 762)

The story of Muʾtah contains all the elements of a thriller spiced with accounts about personal bravery, dedication, magnanimity, and so on. But on the other hand it is the story of a battle which ended in defeat for the Muslim side. This is what gives credibility to the general outline of the story, which also tries to explain the reason for the failure in spite of Allah's frequent aid to His believers. Every listener to the story could understand that the main reason for the Muslim defeat was the unusual disproportion between the number of the Muslim force of only 3,000 men and its adversaries numbering no less than 200,000. Also in the legends about other battles, which ended with Muslim victories, the storytellers always emphasized a huge difference in numbers between the Muslim warriors and their enemies, in favour of the latter, but never in such a ratio of more than 1:66 which appear in the story of Muʾtah.

The failure of the invasion to Muʾtah did not change the fact that the enlargement of the Islamic embryonic state was the strategic aim of the Prophet. Travelers and merchants, who acted on the side also as spies, reported that the area as far as Maᶜān was completely exposed, and that the settlements of the Mount of Edom (al-Jibāl and ash-Sharāt) between al-Ṭafīlah and the Dead Sea were defenseless. Eilat and its environs were in the same situation. The Ghassānids, whichever organization they had after the last Persian war, were limited in

their ability to defend areas that lay too far to the south from their centres around the Golan and the Ḥawrān. Moreover, even if they possessed such ability there was no reason for them to stretch their limited defense facilities, which could not be very substantial, to areas in which they had no real interests and that lay far away from their home.

Gradually the Prophet's name became famous also in southern Syria. The conquest of Mecca in January 630 strengthened his position in the Ḥijāz, and delegations representing distant tribes came to Madinah to secure treaties with him, and to accept him as a prophet. Therefore when it became known that he was planning an incursion to the southern regions of Syria, the inhabitants of these regions did not wait for him, they learnt that he mobilized his forces in Tabūk and quickly organized a delegation to meet him there, and to sign with him *ṣulḥ* agreements in order to prevent his invasion altogether. The delegation, we are told, was headed by Yuḥannā b. Ruʾbah the leader of the Christian community of Eilat. There were also representatives of some "Jewish" communities from Maqnā near Eilat, and from Jarbā and Adhrūḥ on the north. The Prophet entered into agreements with all of them following the custom of the protection agreements between strong Bedouin leaders and defenseless settlements. The Prophet promised not to attack the villages and protect them to the best of his ability, and the settlements, on their part, committed themselves to pay an annual tax, not to help the enemies of the Muslims, and extend hospitality to the Muslim warriors who pass through their territory.[38]

Ṣulḥ agreements were such a common practice in the desert that one can hardly suspect these traditions that attribute their practicing also to the Prophet himself. They represented a simple reality: the settlement on the other side of the Jordan Valley, particularly those that lay on the far end, southeast of the ʿArabah down to and along the Gulf of Eilat, had to avoid the danger of the marauders by making agreements with the strongest authority in the area. There was nobody at that time who could both endanger them and protect them, more than the Prophet. Protection agreements between the strong and the weak, for which the latter had to pay in money and kind, do not have to follow a war. On the contrary, they represent submission before the war, and unlike agreements of armistice – *hudnah* – that are limited in time, *ṣulḥ* agreements are not limited in time. Any group of people who entered into the protection agreement *ipso facto* accepted the authority of the person who bestowed the protection. The mere publicity given to such an agreement was sufficient to secure security to the protected party. It was also in the interest of the protecting side, to see to it that its protégé is not harmed, for any such harm would mean a challenge to his status and authority.

It is very possible that some of the details in these agreements attributed to the Prophet represent later development by Muslim jurists, since they became

prototypes for all the *ṣulḥ* agreements that the Muslims concluded with the population in the territories which they conquered. It is also possible that the whole story about these *ṣulḥ* agreements was created long after the time of the Prophet. After the conquests and after the Muslim administration had already been established and the legal system crystallized, these southern non-Muslim communities (whether Jewish or Christian), wishing to receive special treatment by the the newly established, Muslim administration, presented documents "from the time of the Prophet," defining the amount of tax which they had to pay. The practice, which we call today forgery of documents, was not, so it seems, an unusual one. At least one such document was preserved by Balādhurī according to which in the agreement, which was supposed to have been concluded between Caliph ʿUmar and the Christian inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Caliph renewed the old Christian prohibition of Jews from living in the Holy City. Many years ago Goitein drew attention to this forgery which contradicted the situation on the ground, since immediately after the Islamic conquest, Jews returned to Jerusalem and according to Muqaddasī, himself a native of the city, constituted together with Christians the majority in it.[38a]

We would not be mistaken, at any rate, if we conclude that around 630, more than three years before the invasion of Syria, with or without these agreements, the southern parts of Trans-Jordan were effectively under Islamic rule. The fact that all the traditions insist that the local population concluded agreements that meant capitulation to the Prophet, at least hint to the fact that there was no Byzantine Imperial authority in the southern regions of Syria. The Prophet must have evaluated correctly the new situation, and might have planned to widen the scope of his influence northwards towards Trans-Jordan, as most of the sources report, but in 632 he suddenly died before accomplishing his plans.[39]

THE INVASION OF SYRIA AND ITS CIRCUMSTANCES

About a year after the death of the Prophet, the Muslims were busy with themselves. The new leader Abū Bakr (632–634), Muḥammad's father-in-law and close companion, had to send army to fight the elements which left the Islamic Union or followed their own prophets. At the end of 633, the operation, which came to be known by all the sources that represent the Muslim side, as the "Wars of the Riddah," was successfully accomplished. The availability of fighting force, the quick reaction of Abū Bakr and good military command, enabled the fast vanquishing of the secession trends and the elimination of the independent prophetic movements.[40] Meanwhile, however, a large body of fighters concentrated in northern Arabia, and Bedouin "volunteers" from all over the peninsula arrived, with their families and flocks in the vicinity of Madinah and the war zones. The

chance of taking part in the battles and enjoying the spoils of war was one of the main reasons for the swelling of the Bedouin fighting element around Madinah. Without a vent for the energies of such force it could be very dangerous for the government and a threat to public order.

To the delight of the Amīr al-Muʾminīn, and with his blessing, the forces which fought the "Riddah Wars" in north-eastern Arabia engaged themselves in plundering the Persian territories in southern Iraq, but the pressing problem was the growing force which had accumulated in a big camp near Madinah. Abū Bakr and his colleagues took a very quick decision: they connected between the interest of the Bedouins and the interest of Islam. The Bedouins wanted booty, and easy booty seemed to wait in the north; the interest of the government in Madinah was to get rid as quickly as possible of an unemployed battle seeking Bedouin. It is very reasonable that Hamilton Gibb was correct when he said that the only way to ease the Bedouin pressure was by starting a campaign on a new front; and the Commander of the Faithful gave the order to invade the Byzantine territory by way of Trans-Jordan.[41] He could back his decision by the claim that he is following the Prophets legacy. These Arabic sources kept something of the reasons behind this decision: tradition quoted by Balādhurī asserts that the Amīr al-Muʾminīn connected in his call for the campaign between the religious duty of Jihād and "the booty of the Greeks" (*ghanā'im ar-rūm*) awaiting the warriors. The tradition defines the invading force as composed of two kinds of people: God-fearing who sought the reward of Allah (*muḥtasib*) and those who were after the plunder (*ṭāmiʿ*).[42]

I have shown that the exposed southern desert border invited a Bedouin incursion into Syria. In addition to the vulnerability of the Byzantine and Persian territories, there were also Arab forces available, and the war tension was in the air following the Byzantine-Persian mega-battles and, on the local scene, the Riddah skirmishes in north Arabia. In time the Arabic tradition gave an orderly character to the whole campaign, and attributed to the Caliph not only the decision of the invasion of Syria but also its detailed planning. True it is not possible to deny completely the authority of the Commander of the Faithful and his direct involvement in the campaign; he was informed in general about the development of the operartions on both fronts, the Syrian and the Iraqi, but not in real time. However, it is very doubtful whether he had any influence on what was actually happening in the field as the Arabic accounts present it. It seems that the Prophet's wars which he had conducted for ten years, the plunder raids which he initiated, and the wars of the Riddah, whatever was their actual size, created an organized military body[43] that formed the nucleus around which collected multitudes of Bedouin warriors – irregulars – with their families and belongings, and

they made the invasion look like a mini-migration of peoples, which had always been part of the historical reality in the border lands of the desert.

The outline story of the campaign northwards via Trans-Jordan in the Arabic sources looks quite authentic if one makes the effort to unwrap from it the heavy cover of legend. I shall soon analyze the traditions from which the story is composed. These traditions, or accounts, describe a central management of the war, which was planned to its last detail by the center at Madinah, including some tactical decisions. Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān, according to most traditions, was nominated the Commander-in-Chief of the whole army. He represented the Meccan nobility before Islam, according to the standard biography of the Prophet, his father, Abū Sufyān, led the Meccan opposition to Muḥammad. He belonged to a very rich and prestigious family, enjoyed personal respect, and was well into regional politics. The chroniclers assure us that he led the Meccan trade and was well acquainted with the working methods of the Byzantine administration, and had the opportunity to meet some of the top Byzantine officials. (The story of Abū Sufyān's meeting with the Emperor himself is a legend and was created in Umayyad circles, mainly in order to show that he was not completely convinced of his opposition to the Prophet.) His sons Yazīd and Muʿāwiyah grew up in an atmosphere of political and economic activity. They both knew how to read and write, and they also were acquainted with the Byzantine administrative systems. Muʿāwiyah in particular was famous for his sharpness of mind, political and administrative abilities. Traditions, even those that represent the Umayyad enemies, hail his patience and unusual intelligence.

The Prophet correctly sensed that the old Meccan leadership, particularly the Umayyads, was a very important asset for him personally and for his mission. He sought the friendship of Abū Sufyān and married his daughter Umm Ḥabībah after she had lost her husband.[44] This wedding made Abū Sufyān the Prophet's father-in-law, and Umm Ḥabībah became the Mother of the Faithful, Muʿāwiyah and Yazīd became the Prophet's brothers-in-law. It is difficult to imagine that these family relations are a later Umayyad inventions, for not only that there is no source which contradicts them, but also because they represent a well established practice of strengthening political alliances by marriage. Surely these family relations were significant, for they enabled the Prophet and Abū Sufyān keep close contacts with each other even during the period of the enmity between the Prophet and the Meccans. Although traditions speaking about the Prophet's pleasure with his close relationship with the Umayyads and his particular contentment with the fact that Muʿāwiyah was his brother-in-law were created in Umayyad anti-Shīʿite circles, in their general outlines, not their details, they seem reasonable.[45] All agree that after the conquest of Mecca, the prophet chose Muʿāwiyah as one of his chief secretaries.[46] The tradition which was later created in the Umayyad court

took this fact and turned it into a messianic message which made Archangel Gabriel, no less, order Muḥammad to nominate Muʿāwiyah to write down the Qurʾān.[47]

Abū Bakr had no good reason to deviate from the precedent set by the Prophet. The Umayyads were the best candidates to lead the invasion of Syria. They were well acquainted with the region, they enjoyed the prestige of money and nobility, and they were used to commanding people. As I have hinted, the status of the so-called "jāhilī" aristocracy was still very high. However, when dealing with early Islamic history it should always be born in mind that the traditions about the Islamic conquests (like other traditions dealing with other events of that early period) were collected and written down at least one hundred years after the events, and it has already been observed more than once that these traditions represented various considerations – political, personal, tribal, sectarian, religious, legal and many others that belong to the time of their composition. Many traditions, even if originally contained true information, underwent such changes along the way that by the time they reached their collectors they had already moved far away from their original form and contents.

The early Islamic history was not only written in order to supply information, but also and mostly to entertain, to fulfill intellectual curiosity, and to supply arguments for this or the other side in the frequent debates between the adherents of contending parties. History as such was not regarded as a serious intellectual field of interest, and whoever dealt with it (such as Ṭabarī for instance) had to earn his position among the scholars by proving his ability in one of the serious classical "sciences of islam" – Arabic language, Qurʾān and its interpretation, and *ḥadīth*.[48]

This is an opportunity to add another note about the nature of the Arabic historical sources, a subject which I shall have to deal with in more detail later on. In most cases the so called historical sources are in actual fact *adab* works – that is to say literary compilations in which the historical events are only the skeleton for the plot.[49] To learn history from them is like learning Roman and English history from Shakespeare plays. These captivating stories about the events in the heroic age of Islam had also an important side which touched directly upon theological reflections, legal considerations, as well as the social and political relations in the evolving Arab-Islamic society. For this reason the clergy, on the one hand used these stories in order to emphasize the ever presence of Allah's support, securing victories to his religion, and on the other hand many families, anxious to secure for themselves a respectable role in the events of the heroic age and the creation of the empire, made sure that their forefathers took part in the major campaigns. They inserted traditions that described their ancestors valour in the fields of battle, and whenever possible also bestowed on them martyrdom in the

Jihād. We shall soon see that it is quite usual to find in the war stories names of many peoples who took part in several battles and were also killed in each one of them!

I have already mentioned that the traditions about the conquests wish to emphasize that the guiding hand of the Commander of the Faithful from Madinah was behind the military operations. However, it should be reiterated that when in the process of the invasion, Bedouin tribes migrated with families and belongings, and after a few months were very far away from Madinah, it is impossible to envisage that the Caliph could have any control on the events in the field. These rolled on as they happened, and were somehow controlled by the commanders on the spot, who it is doubtful whether they always consulted the supreme command. This is the reason for the existence of the various accounts about the leadership of the army, and about a chief inspector whose duty was to guard the interests of the Commander of the Faithful (usually, Abū ʿUbaydah).

Such an organized account was preserved by Balādhurī, in whose book about the conquests there are many parts characterized by restrained reporting, and an attempt to remain close to the facts. However, while he mentions that there was guidance of the operations,[50] he also says that there were many independent commanders ("every commander received the command over three thousand men;" later: "seven thousand").[51] Also the traditions that speak about Yazīd as the Commander-in-Chief, emphasize that the army had three columns, and that each one of them was headed by a very well known political figure that followed his own personal plans. One cannot escape the feeling that the accounts of the traditionalists, a century after the happening represent their views of the events, not the reality about which they possessed only far echoes preserved in stories that represented interests, wishes, beliefs, all cast in the molds of rich imagination

However, two facts are agreed upon by the majority of the sources: that the commander in the field during the decisive stages of the operations in Syria was Khālid b. al-Walīd the hero of Muʾtah, and that the Sufyānids were closely involved with the invasion. The latter, soon after the situation in field cleared up, and the Islamic victory was a fact, appeared as the local leaders in occupied Syria, became its official governors, and finally took over the Caliphate and endowed it with an imperial standing. The fact that the traditions about the part played by the Sufyānids in the conquest of Syria were collected and written down in the time of the ʿAbbāsids, whose militant revolution replaced the Umayyads, gives them greater credibility.

The traditional pattern speaks about three columns that left Madinah each headed by its own general. The first, under the command of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ, advanced along the Spice Route via Eilat or via Wādī Mūsā towards the centre of the Negev. According to these traditions this force reached the vicinity of Gaza

and defeated an army which was stationed at Dāthin (some 18–19 km east of Gaza).[52] Kaegi examined the sources relating to this event, and found out that the conflict between the Arabs and the Byzantine force at Dāthin had nothing to do with the Arab invasion. It was rather a reaction of the Bedouin tribes in the southern Negev and North Sinai to the return of the Byzantine Imperial authority. During the Persian occupation they had enjoyed large profits from trading in expensive commodities without paying taxes, now with the return of the Empire, the old customs system was re-imposed.

They had also received annual payments in order to prevent other Bedouin attacks on the city and its surroundings. Now that these payments were withheld and the customs returned, they reacted by exposing to mauraders all the routes to Gaza and from there to the whole coastal plain, attacked a Byzantine unite and killed Sergius, its commander, who held the honorary title of Candidatus. Sergius who also had other names, probably the Armenian name – Ba[r]yrdan – which in the Arabic sources was rendered Wardān – was the governor of Palaestina Prima and sat it Caesarea Maritima. Like the Emperor himself he did not anticipate any major problem from the desert side, and like the Emperor he had no real idea about the force which had been growing up in Arabia while the Empire was occupied with the wars against the Persians and the Slavs. He was in full agreement with the Emperor, after the victory over the Persian, about the need to cut back the expenses of the administration and the military. When he heard, therefore about the unrest among the Bedouins, he took some 300 soldiers (a number which can hardly be exaggerated, but is still unreliable) and went southwards, some 125 km away from his capital city, with the intention to punish the insurgents. He seems to have been totally ignorant of the nature of both the territory and the enemy. The Bedouins prepared an ambush into which he fell. Part of his force was annihilated and he fell in the battle.[53]

There is much confusion between the Greek, Syriac and Arabic sources about this event. Was it ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ who in a long range raid succeeded to surprise and kill the close friend of the Emperor, the governor of Palaestina. Such a venture no doubt brought much honour to ʿAmr and his clan. The ambush of Sergius had all the spices needed for a good story, and must have become part of the repertoire of storytellers. Since it happened at about the same time as the beginning of the invasion, the story needed only a small change; instead of an anonymous Bedouin who killed Sergius it was ʿAmr. Or is it possible that both were involved in the battle; ʿAmr who appeared on the scene just when the local Bedouins rebelled against the decision of the Empire to impose its authority? Balādhurī, who in the 9th century says that he relies on Syrian sources, is not decisive. The story about the confrontation between ʿAmr and the Byzantine Patricius-Biṭrīq is wrapped in legendary attire and contains a religious message.

Other traditions that demonstrate a factual nature say that the first meeting between the invading Arabs and the Byzantines took place in the ʿArabah valley not before. The account about the Dāthin confrontation is anonymous or collected from a few unidentified sources ("*qālū*"), a hint to its origin in storytellers' repertoire:

> It is told: the first battle between the Muslims and their enemies was in one of the villages of Gaza called Dāthin. It was between them and the Patricius (biṭrīq) of Gaza(!); and they fought there a heavy battle. Then Allah gave victory to his followers and defeated his enemies, and scattered them in all directions ... Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān turned to pursue that Patricius, and he was informed that in the ʿArabah, which belonged to the land of Palestine, there was a concentration of the Byzantines. He sent against them Abū Umāmah aṣ-Ṣudā b. ʿAjlān al-Bāhilī; he attacked them and killed their leader, and then left. (Note 55 below)

This account about the meeting in the ʿArabah (Ghimr al-ʿArabāt[54] Map Israel 1:100,000 Grid 16789900) is also based on the ambiguous sources called "the elders of the people of Syria – *mashāyikh ahl ash-shām*:

> On the authority of the elders of ash-Shām: the first battle that the Muslim ever fought was in the ʿArabah. Before that they did not enter into any battle since they left Ḥijāz. But thare was not even one place since they left Ḥijāz until the place of this battle, which had not come under their authority without war.[55]

The Dāthin tradition speaks in fact about a battle which had not been decided, and that only later, in the ʿArabah the Byzantine commander was killed. It is not clear if it was "the *biṭrīq* of Gaza," who re-organized his forces in the ʿArabah or another commander who tried to block the Muslim advance towards the central Negev at the entrance of one of the spice routes that connected Petra with Gaza via Oboda (ʿAvedat, ʿAbdeh) and Elousa (Ḥaluṣah; al-Khalaṣah).

The tradition about the encounter in the ʿArabah seems more orderly and logical. ʿAyn al-Ghimr is one of the very few perennial and rich springs (7.1 m^3 water an hour) in the ʿArabah, on the road which leads from Petra via the Ramon Crater (Wādī ar-Ramman) to Oboda and thence to Gaza. Since Antiquity this branch of the Spice Route was very well known to all travelers and caravan leaders who traveled from south Arabia to the port of Gaza and the Sea Route. Scattered all along, were water holes, resting places and small forts.[56] It provided an excellent access into the Negev and the coastal plain for friend and foe alike. It is very reasonable that if the Byzantine governor of Palaestina Prima wished to block an invasion via the Spice Route, his best bet was to block this branch already in the ʿArabah, at the entrance of the canyons system which led into the heart of the Negev. It is also reasonable that one Byzantine force was sent to block it, while Sergius with another detachment went to deal with the rebelling Bedouins in the south, who threatened the environs of Gaza, and the travel and

pilgrimage routes to Sinai. It is possible that the rebelling Bedouins had been joined by some of the invaders from Arabia. At any rate, The Byzantine estimated wrongly their enemy, and the small detachments which went in both directions were routed.

If indeed ʿAmr joined the Bedouin insurgence near Gaza (which is very unlikely) then his move did not have any strategic significance. It was a kind of hit-and-run operation with which the inhabitants of these desert border areas were very well acquainted. Balādhurī's tradition mentions ʿAmr, neither in this event nor in the episode of ʿAyn al-Ghimr.[57]

Granted that it is possible to accept the general outline of the Muslim traditions it may be surmised that the Arab invaders, led by good scouts, already knew that the Byzantine government was absent and that the Arab faederati, in spite of being mostly Christians, were either neutral or even hostile to the Byzantines. They also realized that there was nothing to stop them from reaching with their families and flock, the rich grazing land of the Ḥawrān in the beginning of spring, but their wild dream was to reach Damascus which they had likened to Paradise no less.

They could have penetrated western Palestine. Sophronius's description of Bedouins freely roaming around Jerusalem, proves that some tribal unites actually did. Numerous times throughout history, the weakness of the central government exposed the Judean desert and the nearby settlements of the mountainous area overlooking the Jordan valley, chiefly Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron, to the Bedoiun menace. However, most of the Muslim forces remained on the eastern side of the Jordan. Yazīd, and the other commanders that had some influence on the crowds, through their chieftains, understood that they should remain as close to the desert as possible. It defended their back and their right flank, and in times of need it was a very efficient refuge. It is reasonable, although it cannot be proven, that at that stage of the invasion the leaders were hesitant to entangle themselves in the settled areas of western Palestine. Most of the sources, even those who say that Ibn al-ʿĀṣ reached Gaza, agree that the city did not fall before 637.[58]

The unites involved in the skirmish at ʿAyn al-Ghimr also turned immediately eastward, passing Danaea[59] they went towards Ḥeshbon (Ḥasbān), and Philadelphia (ʿAmmān). Without any resistence they reached Bostra (Buṣrā) the capital of the Ḥawrān, traditional capital of Provincia Arabia since CE106, and an important ecclesiastical centre. Here the invaders were already deep inside the territory of the Ghassānids, who at that moment in time declined to cross-swords with them, and they felt free to scatter with their flocks in the grazing areas in the south of the Ḥawrān. By now the invasion started to look as a permanent people's migration rather than a seasonal raid. Anxious reports reached the Emperor that the Arabs

were besieging Buṣrā. At that time he was in Antioch disturbed by the news that his capital was under the danger of being besieged by the Slavs and Avars.

However, the Byzantine authorities felt now that they had to take some action against the Arabs; the hitherto hesitant Ghassānids, very reluctantly, were ready to help. The Islamic accounts say that Yazīd learnt that a large Byzantine army assembled in northern Syria, and was on its way southwards. He sent the Caliph anxious calls for help to which Abū Bakr responded by ordering Khālid b. al-Walīd to leave the Iraqi front and hasten to Syria with his horsemen. Here we meet again the traditions that wish to emphasize the fact that the Caliph controlled the military operations from Madinah. The siege of Buṣrā could not be too effective since the Bedouins had no idea about besieging or being besieged. They had no siege machinery, and therefore the siege of Buṣrā could not be more than the presence around the town of the marauding Bedouins who probably posed some danger for whomever left it. This was a situation similar to that of Jerusalem described by Sophronius, a few years later.

Let us consider the time order as it appears in the sources: Yazīd's call for help was sent to the Caliph the latest in early March 634, and could reach Madinah only after two weeks of intensive journey. The Caliph sent his order to Khālid in southern Iraq and added to his message that "one village in Syria is preferable in his eyes to a whole settled region in Iraq."[60] (It is doubtful whether this tradition has even a grain of truth; its aim to praise Syria in comparison to Iraq is too transparent).

The Caliph's order could not have reached Khālid before April. Khālid complied, but moving northwards towards Syria proper through Dūmat al-Jandal he took his time, raiding along his way, a few places. According to Balādhurī's tradition he left for Syria not before Rabīʿ II, 13 namely June 634, no less than two months after receiving the Caliph's order. Or are we talking about another set of traditions with another set of dates? Wāqidī's tradition reports that on his way to Buṣrā Khālid did not miss he opportunity of attacking the Ghassānids during Easter celebrations,[61] that is to say no later than 24 April of that year.[62] In other words the whole time sequence in the traditions is impossible whichever way one looks at it.

Khālid's trek from Iraq to Syria was one of the most favorite stories in the repertoire of Arab storytellers. The wonder of crossing the desert with 600 or even 800 horses, not along the usual travellers route, and without secure water resources, became the topic for many excited and admiring verses.[63] Let us put aside our puzzle about the accuracy of the traditions. After all you do not expect to find in heroic and romantic stories more than what they contain. Instead let us follow the story and see what one can learn from it about the stages of the war. Let us leave the inconsistency of the impossible dates proposed by the traditions,

and let us assume that Khālid and his horsemen arrived near Damascus on Easter day and continued to Buṣrā (April 634). Six hundred horsemen (not to say 800) in terms of these days, and in comparison to the army which the Byzantines could muster, was a tremendous fighting power. It is doubtful if the Empire itself could put into the field this kind of fighting cavalry with or without the faederati. It is impossible to know what was the size of the cavalry force which came with Khālid, for there is no way that one can rely on numbers, particularly on such round figures, which appear in the stories. Even one tenth of this number of horsemen could be decisive in the battlefield against the Byzantine infantry. The cavalry came from the faederati. The main legions were at that time in northern Syria or moved to the Danube front, which had then priority over all other fronts, and the Arab faederati had long ago ceased to cooperate with the Empire.

Khālid had prestige which he brought with him from Muʾtah, and the Riddah and his later exploits in Iraq. It is very doubtful whether there is any truth in the story that he was nominated the supreme commander of all the Muslim forces in Syria. In the multitude of chieftains, notables, various tribal groups, ambitious commanders in the fields, it is hard to imagine any semblance to an Imperial high command. But such a high command did exist in the Imperial forces of the Caliphate in the 8th and 9th centuries, when these stories were collected, and the chroniclers who tried to give them some order moulded them in the patterns of the armies of their time with which they were familiar. At any rate, all these accounts connect Khālid intimately with the conquests in their decisive period. His career was short; ʿUmar, the second Caliph disliked him (this in itself adds just the right amount of spice to our story), and immediately after he had come to power he kicked him out of any influential position, in the army or otherwise. Let us therefore assume that Khālid was in a position to influence the military operations in Syria between 634 and 636.

When the accounts about Khālid are stripped of their literary ornamentations it is possible to extract from them reasonably reliable material about him. As a commander he understood that the Bedouins had neither the patience nor the ability of engaging fortifications. He also knew that the Bedouin way of life, and the need to find all the time grazing areas would definitely turn into an impatience element if they had to camp idly in front of the walls of a city. His military moves, as far as they can be reconstructed, stemmed from this reality. The major cities of Syria opened their gates to him but he was never tempted to establish himself in them. He always kept himself in the open and as near as possible to the desert.

Sometime after he arrived at Buṣrā the city capitulated. The *ṣulḥ* agreement concluded with it was very reasonable and enabled the city to continue its life peacefully protected by the agreement. It was not destroyed or burnt and its security condition were much better than in the previous period. The news

reached other cities and influenced their decision to follow suit: better accept the Arab protection than resist them.

About this time, the end of March or the beginning of April 634, a *ṣulḥ* agreement was concluded with a little village in Trans-Jordan called in the Arabic sources Maʾāb, the Rabbat Moab of antiquity – Aereopolis. Some sources say that it was the first settlement in Syria proper with which such an agreement was concluded, and this became a prototype to all subsequent agreements. Maʾāb was famous for its wine that gained her the praise of the poet Ḥātim aṭ-Ṭāʾī. who in his verses also indicated exactly its geographical location:

> May the Lord of men abundantly and eternally water,
> the south of the Sarāt from Maʾāb till Zughar;
> The land of the man whose house knows no shame
> There is the clear drink never to be murky.

Another poet, from Madinah, added his comment about the inhabitants of Maʾāb:

> To Maʾāb we shall come, by my father's life!
> Though in it dwell Arabs and Greeks.[64]

The importance of Maʾāb is that it was apparently the first place in Trans-Jordan where the Byzantines planned to renew their defense System. However, even if some Byzantine soldiers actually appeared in Maʾāb they must have left after the Emperor's visit in 630. The reports about the conquest of Maʾāb mention no the Byzantines, and substantially no resistance to the invading Arabs. In Balādhurī's tradition which describes the capitulation of Maʾāb the enemy is not identified as Byzantine, but as "the gathering of the enemy" (*jamᶜ al-ᶜaduww*).[65] Also in Ṭabarī's late and edited account the enemy remains anonymous and the occupation of the place is described as a short resistance followed by a *ṣulḥ* agreement: "They fought against him and afterwards they asked for *ṣulḥ* and he concluded *ṣulḥ* with them."[66] Nobody on both sides seem to have been hurt.

Kaegi overstresses the military importance of the conquest of Maʾāb, but his view that a sizeable battle took place there cannot be substantiated.[67] The *ayyām* storytellers could not have missed such a battle. Besides, Kaegi himself agrees that there was no Byzantine army in the area, and assumes that local Arabs were those who first fought the invaders. This is not impossible. In the history-long battle between settlers and Bedouins, and among Bedouins, over land and water, sometimes one side put on resistance in order to receive better *ṣulḥ* conditions, and this is what actually could have happened in this case too. In other words, the sources clearly show that except for the skirmishes in the ᶜArabah and Dāthin, involving small Byzantine military units, the advance of the Arabs into the heart of Syria proceeded with no real obstruction either from the Byzantine or from the local inhabitants.

The news about the willingness of the invaders to enter into convenient *ṣulḥ* treaties travelled very fast, and most of the settlements of Syria, including even walled cities were ready to open their gates to the invaders and secure themselves by similar agreements. Let us not lose sight of the fact that it was an interim period between two authorities. The Persian left and the former lords have just arrived, but nobody seemed interested to give his life or jeopardize his livelihood to see the reestablishment of Heraclius's rule. On the contrary, as we have seen, the Monophysites among others were quite happy to see the end of the Byzantines and their state church.

The fact that in the vicinity of the major towns there was no defense system at all, and that the invaders roamed for months freely in Trans-Jordan, and ventured even into Western Palestine with no imperial army to block them, also convinced the local population to seek the *ṣulḥ* agreements. There were, no doubt, some loyal subjects of the Emperor who still hoped for his reaction but no one seemed to go out of the way to resist the Arab invaders behind the shut gates of the walled cities. If the hope for any imperial intervention resulted in passive resistance, such as in Jerusalem, it was a short-lived one, once it became clear that a massive reaction by the Empire was not forthcoming. Somehow the situation must have seemed temporary, unsettled on the one hand, but on the other the invaders, and their leaders harmed neither the economic nor the social frameworks, and offered a great degree of security after the long unsettled period marking the end of the Persian rule. The shutting of the towns for a long siege could have been an option only if there were a hope for imperial salvation, but once the imperial armies, as much as they were to be found, demonstrated their weakness, there was no point to endure the inconveniencies of siege. The story about the inhabitants of Adhriᶜāt welcoming the invading Arabs with songs and music embodies the usual romantic flavour but it is very possible that it represents the spirit of the time.[68]

THE DECISIVE BATTLES, THEIR PLACE AND TIME

The exact places of the decisive battles against the Byzantines are important for understanding the character of the Arab invasion and its development. According to the universally accepted view Syria fell after two decisive battles which took place at Ajnādayn and near the Yarmūk River two years apart, and in some other half a dozen minor battles. Let us present the case of these battles in view of what we have already discussed or hinted to. The Arab sources are divided over many details pertaining to these battles: their dates, participants and exact locations. The descriptions of these battles were preserved in the chronicles that were composed during the 9th and the beginning of the 10th centuries. They are based on material from the second half of the 8th century. In other words traditions concerning the

major events that lead to the foundation of the Islamic empire were written down approximately five generations after the events had taken place. In the interim, various traditions were mixed up, details were forgotten, and their place was filled up by tales of heroic deeds taken from the romantic repertoire of the wars between the Arab tribes (which in time were collected forming the special literary genre of *ayyām al-ʿarab*). It served the interest of many people to connect their ancestors with the great events of the foundation of the Islamic empire, and with the Muslim victories, so that warriors appearing in the lists of victims of a certain battle also died a few more times in other battles, and mentioned were alive and well in other traditions many years after their "deaths."[69]

No doubt, the two principal chroniclers who recorded the history of the Muslim conquests, are Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Jābir, al-Balādhurī who died in 279/892 and Muḥammad b. Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī who died in 310/923. They were both excellent Muslim scholars who had access to many original sources. Balādhurī was also an administrator engaged in taxation, and took a special interest in defining the legal status of the territories that the Muslims conquered. It is a well-known fact that according to legal theories developed long after the conquest, different taxation laws applied to land acquired through *ṣulḥ* agreements and to land conquered by force (*ʿanwatan*). This does not mean that the theories of the Muslim doctors of law represent in any way the real situation on the ground in the early days of the Arab invasion, or that their definition of a certain territory according to their classification represents a historical fact. However, as far as Balādhurī was concerned the need to classify the taxable land was in itself a catalyst for his interest in the traditions about "The Conquest of the Lands" – the name of his book on the subject.

Ṭabarī was a universal chronicler, whose aim was to describe the history of the world from the Creation down to his own times, and his massive book has become the cornerstone of Arab historiography. It has been copied, summarized, and imitated by generations of historians that came after him. At this point, it must be said that rather than presenting historical thought, ancient Muslim historiography represents a type of literature with many aims in addition to that of transmitting actual historical facts. In point of fact, by the time the traditions were collected and written down, they were far from representing historical facts. As, I have already pointed out, this was a literature whose aim was to entertain, to give some moral instruction, to boast, to glorify or vilify (usually adorned with verses of poetry) individuals or groups, to serve one or other political end, to tell a good tale etc. Unfortunately this is all the material available to us, and we have to get the most out of it.

Modern historians know very well that this material has been chewed over ad nauseam over the last 150 years by scholars writing about the history of early

Islam. When all is said and done they all repeated the same things, stressing different aspects, and in effect they all summarized Ṭabarī and Balādhurī, here and there adding support from the works of the Byzantine Theophanes and other less detailed Arabic sources. Some 25 years ago, Fred Donner reexamined and reevaluated the whole mass of this material down to its minutest details categorizing it according to its various transmitters.[70] Similarly, Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī toiled in collecting and arranging the material about the battle of Ajnādayn in his article called "The battle of Ajnādayn when and where did it happen?" published thirty years earlier (1951).[71] However, even after these and other exhaustive works which repeatedly examined the literary sources, the problem of establishing the facts relying on them remained virtually unsolved.

There are essential differences between the accounts of Ṭabarī and those of Balādhurī particularly concerning the Battles at Ajnādayn and the Yarmūk. According to Balādhurī and his sources, the first decisive battle between the Byzantines and the Arabs occurred at Ajnādayn in 634 and the second took place two years later, in 636, near the Yarmūk. According to Ṭabarī's main tradition the first battle was at the Yarmūk in 634, and the second one at Ajnādayn in 636. These discrepancies were explained already at the end of the 19th century by the fact that Ṭabarī used an unreliable source, particularly since he quotes also other sources which say that a major battle occurred in 13/634 at Ajnādayn exactly at the same time in which according to his other tradition the same battle took place at the Yarmūk.[72] Therefore, Balādhurī's version has been universally accepted as representing the true order of the events.[73] The explanation that the discrepancy in Ṭabarī's reports was the result of an unreliable source is not too convincing. Not only that one should question the overall disqualification of the source which Ṭabarī used while accepting the sources of another "school" as trustworthy, but mainly because it is impossible not to wonder how is it possible that the Arabic sources disagree with each other not about a certain detail or the other, but on the whole event that is so central for early Islamic history.

Moreover, in the Byzantine sources there is no mention of a battle at Ajnādayn, which brought Kaegi to suggest that there is some mix-up between it and the battles of Dāthin and near the Yarmūk.[74] It is not surprising that from such distance in time the dates were already forgotten to such an extant that there is a whole month difference between the dates offered by Balādhurī himself for Ajnādayn (13 of July until 29 August 634: "the battle of Ajnādayn occurred on Monday 17 Jumādā I the year 13; some say in 2 Jumādā II and some say on 27 of the same month ...").[75]

According to all the sources which we possess, and the earliest is the one quoted by Ṭabarī, the event was described as follows: Ajnādayn was a settlement situated in Palestine between Ramlah and Bayt Jubrīn.[76] The Byzantines

assembled there a large army commanded by Theodore, the Emperor's brother (according to another tradition he commanded the Empire's forces in the Battle of the Yarmūk); Khālid transferred the whole Muslim army to Ajnādayn. The decisive battle took place between July and August, and the Byzantines were defeated. Whoever succeeded to survive the battle found refuge in the fortified towns of Syria. Immediately after the victory at Ajnādayn the Muslims engaged the Byzantines in another battle at Wāqūṣah or Yāqūṣah, three kilometers to north of the cliffs of the Yarmūk near its meeting with the Ruqād tributary. This battle happened in the middle of August, and while the Muslims were camped at Wāqūṣah they were informed of the death of Caliph Abū Bakr and his replacement by ʿUmar (634–644) as the new Commander of the Faithful. Note that according to some sources, the battle of the Yarmūk was also fought near Wāqūṣah.[77] Five months after Ajnādayn there was another battle between the Byzantines and the Muslims near Fiḥl (Pella); the Muslims won and following that, most of the towns of Syrian fell into their hands either without, or after minor resistance. In other words, most of the settlements in Syria accepted the Muslim rule by entering into *ṣulḥ* agreements. The towns and villages of the Gilead (al-Balqāʾ), the Golan, the Ḥawrān, and Bathænea opened their gates to the new masters, and even great Damascus capitulated without real resistance. The Emperor, however, did not give up. He collected a large army in Antioch and sent it down via the central towns of Syria. It seems that this expeditionary force, which the Arabic sources describe in wildly exaggerated terms, decided again to take positions near Wāqūṣah and prepared for battle near the Yarmūk. Khālid b. al-Walīd the Muslim general, avoiding the walls of the cities, gave up all his gains in central Syria and retreated with all his forces to the Yarmūk too, presumably to the northern side of the ravine. He waited for a day of hot southeasterly winds and sand storms before he mounted his attack. The Byzantine legionnaires unaccustomed to the sudden change in the climatic conditions started the battle with a clear disadvantage, and the Muslim victory was complete. The Byzantines lost soldiers to the sword as well as to the deep canyons of the Yarmūk and the Ruqād. The Battle of the Yarmūk was the last attempt of the Byzantine to block the Muslim progress in Syria; it failed. Heraclius whose hands were full with the grave situation in his capital, left Antioch when he heard about the outcome of the battle and returned to Constantinople.

This is, in short, the story told by the Arab sources and repeated in all the scholarly works as well. Many parts of this story are quite reasonable. Heraclius came back to Syria that had been under Persian occupation for fourteen years. The chroniclers' accounts say that approximately two years separate the battle of Ajnādayn from that of the Yarmūk. During this period large parts of Syria had already been in Arab hands, however, nothing seemed permanent. In the

Emperor's order of priority, the situation in the northwestern parts of the Empire occupied a very high place. The Danube fortresses and the security of the capital were far more important. The Arab invasion could wait. The occasion would definitely come when those northern regions are pacified and the Persian danger is fully eliminated. At any rate the reconstruction of the Byzantine authority after the victory over the Persians needed time.

In an interim summary the following general information can be gleaned from the Arabic sources. First, most of the settlements in Syrian, except for a few costal towns particularly Caesarea, fell into the hands of the Arabs without or with negligible resistance. Second the two major battles at Ajnādayn and near the Yarmūk interchange in the various traditions, and the battle of Ajnādayn appears in Ṭabarī's traditions twice in both 634 and 636, the latter being the date of the battle of the Yarnmūk according to Balādhurī and other sources,[78] whereas the battle of the Yarmūk appears only once in 634.[79] Third, Ajanādayn is identified towards the end of the 9th, early 10th century as a location near Bayt Jubrīn, that is to say at the entrance of the Biblical Vale of Elah (Wādī as-Sunṭ).

The following conclusions can be reached from this summary:

1. The ability of the Byzantines to deal with the Arab invasion was very limited.

2. The battles which the Arabic sources describe as giant encounters on the battlefields in which tens of thousands of soldiers were involved are impossible since most of the Byzantine army was tied up near the capital and the recruitment of more mercenaries was a very expensive operation which the empty coffer of the Empire could not afford. What is more reasonable is that the local garrisons with probably some small help from Antioch were entrusted with the task of checking the invasion. From time to time full-scale battles flared up.

3. The victories of the Muslims in these battles influenced the reporting about them in the sources collected and registered long time after the events took place. In order to magnify the victories, an impossible ratio between the fighters on each side was fixed: on the Muslim side only a few thousands and on the Byzantine side numerous tens of thousands. It is clear that a victory in such conditions has a very important theological message; Allah fights his enemies by enabling his chosen believers to win battles against all odds.

4. The battles were covered with a thick romantic blanket. But underneath it there is a story about an easy occupation of Syria including Trans-Jordan that played a very important role in the invasion. Through this region the invading Arab forces penetrated Syria, and their leaders made every effort to remain in

> it in maximum proximity to the desert. This is why in most of the Arabic sources the major battles took place on the other side of the Jordan, in Wāqūṣah, Fiḥl and the Yarmūk. It is also clear that the first city which the invaders wished to reach was Damascus – the Paradise of their dreams.

Damascus was situated on the major commerce route with which the Arabs were very well acquainted. It was no doubt the crown capital of Syria, the heart of the Byzantine rule and an important centre of the Church establishment. The fate of the city says much about the whole of the imperial defense system at the time. The city was well fortified, but with no garrison. After a very short mock-siege, it capitulated to the Muslims through a standard *ṣulḥ* agreement at the very beginning of the invasion, already in 635. Even the Arabic sources do not attempt to connect the fall of Damascus with any battles or any heroic deeds. On the contrary it is reported that the negotiations with the Muslim leaders were conducted not by the military but by the civilian administration and the Church clergy. The fall of Damascus led to the capitulation of all the ancient cities of central Syria peacefully. It is important to note that in all cases it was the Church that led the negotiations as well as organizing the cities for whichever defense they could manage. It is not an accident that we find Sophronius leading Jerusalem in war and in the negotiations which led to the capitulation of the Holy City. He also makes it clear that imperial help was not available. Basically, the part played by the Church even before the coming of the Persians, and more so after the return of the Byzantines, prove that there existed an authority vacuum which only the Church as an organized and rich body could fill, not only in the far cities of the Negev but also in the major centres of the Byzantine administration.[80] It is hard to imagine that had there been a few thousand trained soldiers in Syria, and proper garrisons in the fortified towns, the invasion of a few thousand Bedouins into the heart of the country could have been so easy and swift. Still at the very beginning of the invasion the Arabs were not utterly sure of themselves. After all these were the territories of the greatest power on earth for which they had always had great respect. For this reason it is not far-fetched to accept the general outline of the reports about Khālid giving up all his gains in central Syria and retreating to the vicinity of the ready refuge of the desert, were he could fight with light infantry and light cavalry.

WHERE IS AJNĀDAYN?

Since all the Muslim military activity took place to the East of the Jordan on the way to Damascus, identifying the site of the battle of Ajnādayn immediately at the beginning of the invasion in 634 in Western Palestine near Bayt Jubrīn seems

illogical, to say the least. The fact that the name Ajnādayn was not preserved in the region in which it was said to be, troubled the scholars too. At the end of the 19th century Mednikoff came up with the theory that the name Ajnādayn was preserved in the names of two ruins in the vicinity of Bayt Jubrīn at the entrance to the Vale of Elah – Janabah ash-Sharqiyyah and Janabah al-Gharbiyyah. Two Janabas, that is to say Janabatayn. This was the real name of the place, which was corrupted to Ajnādayn, concluded the Russian scholar. Although this suggestion was baseless, particularly since no one could prove that these two ruins existed under these names at the beginning of the Islamic conquest, it was strangely enough accepted by some serious scholars such as Becker and Caetani. This identification collapsed at the end when it was discovered that the name Ajnādayn appear in the Arabic sources already in the ninth century, or possibly earlier,[81] in connection with other matters that had nothing to do with the conquests and many years after the conquests.

When studying the material about the place we should take into consideration that the sources, as it is very customary in Arabic literature, copy each other or copy a mother source, therefore, if a place is mentioned many times it only means that one source was copied many times. More frequently than not the copying authors who had only a text in front of their eyes, and sometimes did not have a clue about the whereabouts of the places mentioned in it, corrupted many place names.

Following the methods of Arab linguistic scholarship, the authors dedicate serious discussions to the form of the name Ajnādayn. Yāqūt wondered if this was a dual form of *ajnād.* The latter word itself is a plural form, and a general meaning of 'armies.' The name means then 'two armies' not a bad name to describe a place where two armies – the Arabs and their foes met. Bakrī, on the other hand suggests that the name is not a dual noun but a plural and should be pronounced Ajnādīn (but why in the accusative or genitive?).[82] These two sources copy earlier traditions according to which they identify the geographical location of the site. Yāqūt chooses a place between "Ramlah and Bayt Jubrīn".[83]

Bakrī prefers another identification that is particularly significant for our discussion. He says that Ajnādayn is in the province of Urdunn, that is to say in northern Palestine which covered a large territory including the Galilee and the Golan. In other words, according to Bakrī, who no doubt quotes some earlier accounts, Ajnādayn could be anywhere in an area, which included the vicinity of the Yarmūk river in the southern Golan or anywhere else in the northern Trans-Jordan or the Galilee. It seems that Bakrī even prefers this identification to the one which places Ajnādayn in the province of Filasṭīn "between Ramlah and Jīrūn[!]" One may assume (though not conclusively) that Jīrūn is a copyist's mistake for Jibrīn or Jibrūn. It is also important to take into consideration that the Arab writers,

when they refer to Jund Filasṭīn or Jund al-Urdunn, they have in mind the administrative division of Syria after the conquest and the establishment the Umayyad administrative division (which practically followed the previous Byzantine one). There is also another problem connected with all the traditions which identify Ajnādayn "between Ramlah and Bayt Jubrīn." It is the explicit mentioning of Ramlah, that was established only at the beginning of the 8th century more than seventy years after the conquest. This is therefore, a late identification of Ajnādayn that takes Ramlah as the defining site; such identification of Ajnādayn, could not have been formalized before Ramlah had long been established. In subsequent Arab writings it is possible to find a deep historical past composed for Ramlah attributing its existence as a city to no less than the time of King David and Solomon.[84]

In spite of the fact that the general view in all the sources subsequent to Balādhurī and Ṭabarī was that Ajnādayn was between Ramlah and Bayt Jubrīn, there are however, in the words of some writers hints to another tradition similar to that of al-Bakrī. Since these writers, in spite of being rather late ones, copy older sources, but none of them seemed to know where the places about which they wrote actually were, they are important to our discussion.[85] Thus Ibn Khaldūn in the 14th century ties up Ajnādayn with Gaza on the one hand and with Bethshean (Baysān) on the other, and also throws in a place by the name of Jilliq.[86] The relevant passage in Ibn Khaldūn's chronicle describes very briefly Khālid's trek from Irāq to Syria emphasizing that Khālid came to enforce ʻAmr b. al-ʻĀṣ in Filasṭīn. Further on Ibn Khaldūn writes, following Ṭabarī as his main source:

> ʻAmr was in the Jordan valley (*al-ghawr*) and the Byzantines had been in Jilliq with Tadāriq (Theodorus, Heraclius's brother). They left Jilliq and went to Ajnādayn which lies beyond Ramlah to the east. Afterwards the men attacked each other. The Byzantines were defeated, and that was in the middle of Jumādā I in that year (AH 13); Tadāriq was killed in battle and Heraclius again encountered the Muslims in Fāqūṣah (copyist's mistake for Wāqūṣah).[87]

It is clear that Ibn Khaldūn did not fully understand Ṭabarī's accounts,[88] and probably also not the other reports which he happened to possess. The problem with all these writers is that they were busy copying stories and traditions. The placing of these traditions in their physical, in this case geographical, context was not their concern. In fact this can be said about the great majority of traditionalists and chroniclers of early Islam. They all copied the traditions and reports which reached them, but nothing more. Even when some method of traditional criticism was introduced, it went in the direction of verifying the trustworthiness of the *rijāl*, the transmitters, more than verifying the body of the traditions *matn* themselves,

and even when the *matn* was given consideration, its placing in context other than that demanded by the methods of *ḥadīth* study was hardly thinkable.

This is the reason why, the writers from Ṭabarī down who repeated these reports, copied, and recopied these place names, had no idea that they were mentioning actual locations lying in a rather large radius. For example, the distance between Ramlah and Bayt Jubrīn, as the crow flies, is no less than 35 km, let alone the distance between Gaza and Baysān.

There were also other accounts that mentioned Ajnādayn in other geographical contexts: the Jordan Valley and certain areas on its eastern side, in the Golan and Ḥawrān. The main Muslim buildup in the early stages of the invasion was in the Jordan Valley after moving northwards from the ʿArabah in the south, where the first encounters with Byzantine units had taken place. The Byzantine forces, whose power it is impossible to estimate were, according to the existing sources in Jilliq, but they left and went to Ajnādayn, which, according to Ibn Khaldūn (but not Ṭabarī) was situated to the east of Ramlah. After the defeat in Ajnādayn the Emperor encountered the Muslims again in Wāqūṣah *in the Golan*. The mention of Jilliq in this context is particularly significant for this discussion attempting to identify, if not precisely, at least approximately, Ajnādayn's site. There is a rather long entry about Jilliq in Yāqūt's geographical dictionary. It says that the name Jilliq was the general name to the Ghūṭah, the rich, well-watered agricultural plain of Damascus; it also referred to one of the villages of Damascus, and it was even the name bestowed on Damascus itself.[89] It is clear that by the time Yāqūt wrote his dictionary the exact meaning of the name had totally been forgotten, but all the information which was in front of the authors pointed to Damascus and its immediate environs as the general territory of Jilliq.

It is also possible, though quite rare, that the name Jilliq belonged to more than one place at one time or another. This indication in the dictionary that Jilliq was the name of a "village from the villages of Damascus" could mean a very large area. It definitely does not specify a defined place if we discard for the moment the out of hand note that Damascus itself was also Jilliq. It is also said that in pre-Islamic times, Jilliq was the residence of the Ghassānid rulers from the family of Jafnah, in addition to their "capital" Jābiyah. Jilliq's exact location, had surely been forgotten in time, but it is absolutely clear that it had never been identified with any location to the west of the Jordan. Henri Lammens, after studying all the available sources reached the conclusion that Jilliq was situated somewhere southeast of Mt. Hermon, far from Damascus, to the south of the Golan and the Ḥawrān, not far from Buṣrā.[90]

Ṭabarī was criticized by some, that he mixed things up when he wrote that the Byzantines moved from Jilliq to Ajnādayn; and de Goeje went as far as suggesting that Ṭabarī actually meant to write Jinīn in the valley of Jesreel instead

of Jilliq; to such an extent de Goeje was convinced that Ajnādayn was in the valley of Elah that he had no doubt that Ṭabarī's "Jilliq" is a copyist mistake. Lammens also thought so. However, before we get busy with correcting Ṭabarī's text, let us examine the structure of his story. Ṭabarī had one tradition which placed Ajnādayn near Jilliq, and another tradition which located it between Ramlah and Bayt Jubrīn. He (or his source) therefore built his story in which both traditions are interwoven resulting in a combined story describing the movement of the Byzantine army from Jilliq to Ajnādayn. Creating this combined account, Ṭabarī now needed to add a note which does not exist in his original tradition: "and Ajnādayn is a town (*balad*) between Ramlah and Bayt Jubrīn in the territory of Filasṭīn." Had Ṭabarī not added this "explanatory note," we would have remained with the pair Jilliq-Ajnādayn, as it should be!

In order to conclude properly the issue of Jilliq, it should be added that a place bearing the same name existed in Spain. Yāqūt explains that when the Umayyads established their independent kingdom in Spain, having fled from Syria following the ʿAbbāsid victory, they named many places in Spain after places in Syria: "They called Sevilla - Ḥimṣ and called another place Ruṣāfah and yet another place Tadmur, and called a place … Jilliq." The story about the transference of the name from Syria means that Jilliq was an important place in Syria, a place which was well known in the Umayyad period, and important enough to take it with them to Spain.

Now let us go back to the stories about the movement of the military forces during the wars of conquests. It is hard to believe that the Byzantines moved whichever forces they had near the capital Damascus, that was in immediate danger, to a far away area near Bayt Jubrīn, for no good strategic reason; particularly since the bulk of the Arab forces were in the Jordan Valley, and the east of the river. Ibn Khaldūn might have sensed the absurdity of the story, if indeed he understood it properly, and concluded that Ajnādayn should be somewhere "to the east of Ramlah," without actually fixing any particular location. However, the frequent mentioning in the souces of Ajnādayn together with Jilliq and Wāqūṣah-Yāqūṣah excludes the possibility that it was some 300 km or more away from these two places.

It should be added that adh-Dhahabī (d. 1347) mentioned that Ajnādayn was situated between Ramlah and Jarash. It is very doubtful that anyone of his contemporaries was able to point out to him any exact location. He must have found two traditions: one that referred to Ajnādayn as located near Ramlah and the other that located it not far from Jarash (Gerassa) in Trans-Jordan; unless adh-Dhahabī means another, less famous and less known place called Jarash (IsraelMap 1:100,000 Grid 15161255) some 4km south of the modern village of Har-Tuv. (ʿArṭūf).[91]

Ajnādayn is again mentioned in connection with Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik and his wars against ʿAbdallāh Ibn az-Zubayr who had set himself up as an independent Caliph in the holy cities in the Ḥijāz, and for a while seems to have seriously endangered the Umayyad rule. Part of the Tribe of Judhām, who had settled in the province of Filasṭīn – the territory on both sides of the Jordan to the south of the line which runs along the valleys of Jezreel (Esdraelon) and Bethshean (Baysān) – supported ʿAbdallāh b. az-Zubayr. Nātil b. Qays, the leader of the tribe acted in the capacity of viceroy for Ibn az-Zubayr against ʿAbd al-Malik. The decisive battle between these two, in which Nātil was killed, took place in Ajnādayn. The story is recorded in Balādhurī's voluminous book of *adab Ansāb al-Ashrāf*,[92] which has only the appearance of a historical compilation, and in another extensive *adab* book, *Murūj adh-Dhahab wa-Maʿādin al-Jawhar* by al-Masʿūdī (d. 956).[93] In the stories about these events in both sources, it is indicated that Ajnādayn was in Filasṭīn.

All the modern scholars who treated the subject of the conquest of Syria accepted the identification of the battlefield of Ajnādayn between Ramlah and Bayt Jubrīn. Moreover, they even placed it in the Vale of Elah. Even after Mednikoff's etymological suggestion was conclusively rejected, there still is a general agreement about the geographical location although there is nothing to back it in the area itself. Thus Caetani, de Goeje, Kaegi (who says that he even visited the place), Donner, Ṭaha al-Hāshimī; in fact more or less everyone who wrote about the Islamic conquests,[94] accepted this classical identification. However, beside the Arab writers who locate Ajnādayn "between Ramlah and Bayt Jubrīn in the province of Filasṭīn," there are others who place it in another Syrian province. Discussing the location of Jilliq in connection with the arrayal of the armies prior to the battle, I have mentioned a few examples for such identification. Bakrī, located Ajnādayn in the province of Urdunn. Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī in his *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, at the beginning of the 9th century, mentions Ajnādayn together with Tadmur, Marj aṣ-Ṣuffar, Baʿalbak (Baalbek) and Damascus.[95] All these places are not in the Province of Filasṭīn. But as we have already seen, Filasṭīn was not the only province in Syria where Ajnādayn was located.

A very grave doubt as to the usual western Palestine location of Ajnādayn was cast by Ibn Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmarī.[96] In the list of the holy places frequently visited, al-ʿUmarī listed a few tombs of the Prophet's companions (*ṣaḥābah*) in the village of *Maḥajjah* or *Muḥajjah* "to the left of the traveller to zuraʿ (*ʿalā yasār adh-dhāhib ilā zuraʿ*), and in it was the battle of Ajnādayn."

Zuraʿ was a very well known place in the Ḥawrān, so that al-ʿUmarī could mention it as an identifying point to direct the visitors to the holy places at Maḥajjah. Discussing Zuraʿ, Yāqūt says that the name should be read with an *alif*, and lists the place in his dictionary under this spelling doubling the *rāʾ* – Zurrā,

but he indicates that "Zurrā which today is called Zuraᶜ (or Zurᶜ) is in the Ḥawrān."[97] Also Harawī (d. 1214) mentioned Maḥajjah as one of the places for *ziyārah* in the Ḥawrān[98] All these sources are particularly important because they point *in passim*, discussing other matters, to the location of Ajnādayn somewhere near Maḥajjah in the Ḥawrān or the south of the Golan.[99]

For against the accepted location of the battle of Ajnādayn between Ramlah and Bayt Jubrīn, we have here a series of names, far more concrete: Zuraᶜ, Maᶜajjah, Jilliq and Wāqūṣah; all pointing to another location in the provinces of Filasṭīn and Urdunn (even Dimashq), but all on the eastern side of the Jordan, none in western Palestine. Also Yaᶜqūbī who describes the Muslim conquests after the famous trek of Khālid b. al-Walīd says that they "occupied Buṣrā, Fiḥl, and Ajnādayn in Filasṭīn." It seems, from this report that Yaᶜqūbī possessed an already systematized tradition in which Ajnādayn appeared together with the other two places in the province of Filasṭīn to the east of the Jordan.[100]

De Goeje considered the possibility that the battle of Ajnādayn took place in Trans-Jordan, for instance in the Ḥawrān, but he rejected it out of hand saying that in such a case the war plan of the Arabs would not be understandable. For the same reason de Goeje also rejected the other possibility that emerges from the sources that Ajnādayn was in the Province of Urdunn. Thus he was left with the only possibility, the one found in the tradition copied by the majority of Arabic sources – that of Bayt Jubrīn. However, it is particularly the mix-up in Ṭabarī's accounts and in the chroniclers that copied him, between the battles of Ajnādayn and the Yarmūk that helps to understand the way by which Ajnādayn migrated from somewhere in the east, near the Yarmūk river in the Ḥawrān-Golan territory to the west near Bayt Jubrīn. In that area about 2km to the north of the course of the Vale of Elah there is a ruin called by the Arabs *Khirbat Yarmūk* (Israel Map 1:100,000 Grid 14781240). This is the ancient Yarmūt, mentioned in the Book of Joshua. Piram her King joined a coalition of the neighbouring kings of Eglon, Lachish and Hebron, formed by Adonizedek King of Jerusalem against Joshua (Joshua 10:3). In war stories much depends on the storyteller; therefore, one storyteller or more could identify the battle of the Yarmūk, near the *river* Yarmūt in Trans-Jordan; other storytellers could place it near the *ruins* of Yarmūk (ancient Yarmūk). If only in one story the battle of Yarmūk was transferred from the river in the east to the *khirbah* in the west, and if there was even one tradition which identified also Ajnādayn in the same area, it is not difficult to see how the two events became mixed-up. This would particularly explain why the battle of Ajnādayn appears twice in Ṭabarī, and the Yarmūk only once (in 634!), this if we accept that there is a possibility that the battle of the Yarmūk is just another name for the battle of Ajnādayn, (or the other way round), or that the two battles occurred in the same place, or that they happened in two nearby places next to the

Yarmūk (the *river* not the *khirbah*). In the last part of this article I shall present the doubts about the Arabic sources in general and about their value as historical sources. My main argument is that what we possess are literary works, whose main interests are war stories that here and there touch upon historical reality. Only that more often than not we are unable to define these touching points between history and legend, and therefore we are left with a collection of several literary prototypes of stories about war and heroism.

Nevertheless, we should at least attempt to find the touching point and discover the historical nucleus of the story. Ajnādayn is no more than a test issue, and it is not senseless to examine de Goeje's argument that it is impossible to understand the war plans of the Arabs if we do not accept the location of Ajnādayn at the Vale of Elah in the province of Filasṭīn.[101]

I have already pointed out several times that it would be senseless to attribute war-plans to invading Bedouins. The suggestion that a high command stationed in Madinah planned and directed the war maneuvers of an orderly army has very little to rely on beside the fact that it is by its very nature anachronistic. Some twelve years ago Fred Donner made an admirable effort to prove that there was such a central planning, and that the army was the first organized body to be established in the Islamic state, and that this organization began already during the *riddah* wars; soon after the Prophet's death in 632.[102] There is much sense in Donner's argument about the naissance of a nucleus of an organized body of fighters. It existed already in the last years of the Prophet. Whether we can call this body of fighters a regular army depends on the definition of the term "regular army." One thing is sure, it did not resemble anything described by the same term in the Roman-Byzantine or the Persian military practice. Donner's other claim that the whole invasion was planned and directed from Madinah is, however, far from convincing. Moreover, if one assumes that Khālid b. al-Walīd, once appearing on the scene, controlled in some way the movements of the invading Arabs, it is exactly in such a case that it is impossible to understand how such a major battle took place in the centre of Western Palestine. On the contrary, it is much more plausible that such a battle would be fought in Trans-Jordan after the fall of Buṣrā on the way to Damascus, near the rich grazing land of the Ḥawrān in the protective proximity of the desert.

In other words, the geographical location of Ajnādayn, is very important particularly for this discussion on the general proceeding of the Arab invasion. Is it possible that in such an early stage of their movement northwards in a sparsely populated territory, having taken Buṣrā and always keeping their rear and right flank protected by the desert, the Arabs moved all their forces to western Palestine (in which route?) in order to pitch a battle against the Byzantine in conditions so favourable for their enemies? Is it possible that Khālid b. al-Walīd, who had

proved himself a very talented commander, allowed the Byzantine to choose the battlefield in an area of mild climate, and particularly favourable for infantry warfare (since ancient times), when an Arab defeat could mean total annihilation of the whole, or most of the invading forces.? How is it that we do not hear anything in the sources about the fall of the whole of the Western Palestine immediately after the victory?

Once Ajnādayn – is located at the Yarmūk the scene of the subsequent operations logically returns to the northern parts of the country with the subsequent capitulation of all the settlements in Trans-Jordan, Tiberias and Bethshean, the latter being the most accessible locations in Western Palestine to the invading Arabs via the Yarmūk river. Moreover, what is the mix-up in the sources between the dates of Ajnādayn and the Yarmūk? Is it possible that the exact date of such an important and central battle, which decided the fate of Syria was forgotten and it is reported to have taken place on at least two different occasions? Furthermore, immediately after the battle of Ajnādayn, Balādhurī (whose reports influenced so much modern research) describes a battle against the Byzantines in Yāqūṣah. This battle happened only a few days after Ajnādayn. Had the battle of Ajnādayn taken place near Bayt Jubrīn, the Arabs would have needed the earth to fold for them, even if they had been without their families in order to reach the southern part of the Golan, including crossing the Jordan, in a few days. Balādhurī also says that the news about the death of the Caliph Abū Bakr reached the Muslims immediately after the battle of Ajnādayn when they were in Yāqūṣah. The earliest date for the battle of Ajnādayn is 11 July 634, and the latest date is 29–30 August 634. Abū Bakr died on 23 August of that year, and probably even at the end of July. It is possible that Muslims were in all the places, and in all the dates mentioned by the sources, only if Ajnādayn was in the northern part of Trans-Jordan not in Western Palestine.

The fact that the battle of Yāqūṣah was so proximate in time to Ajnādayn[103] raises the possibility that it was the same battle under different names; and the fact that the battle of the Yarmūk also was in the vicinity of Yāqūṣah-Wāqūṣah[104] strengthens the possibility that all these important battles were fought at the same place, that is to say near the Yarmūk river around Yāqūṣah. This explains the mix-up between the battle of the Yarmūk and the battle of Ajnādayn and the repetition in the reports of Ṭabarī who has two separate traditions on the battle of the Yarmūk and on the battle of Ajnādayn that took place exactly at the same time. This also explaines why there is such a mix-up in the lists of the Muslims killed in these battles: names of fighters who were supposedly killed in Ajnādayn appear as taking part in the Yarmūk, and also vice-versa. Or maybe after all it is only one decisive battle, that was fought on the wide plateau to the north of the Yarmūk near the meeting place between its deep gorge and that of its tributary the Ruqād,

which in time was broken in the mouth of the storytellers to many battles? After all, Theodore (Theodorus, Theodoric, Tadāriq in Arabic) the Emperors brother is said, according to one story, to have commanded the Byzantines in Ajnādayn, and according to another story in the Yarmūk.

Non-Arabic sources may support this suggestion. An anonymous Syriac chronicle, written in 640 speaks about one battle that took place "twelve 'miles' east of Gaza" right at the beginning of the invasion on February 634, but it does not mention either Ajnādayn or the Yarmūk.[105] A chronicle from 819 mentions only one battle between the Byzantines and the Muslims – the battle of Yarmūk.[106] The largest amount of details about the Arab-Byzantine wars appear in the chronicle of Dionysius of Tel Maḥre, who was a Syrian Orthodox (or Jacobite) Patriarch between 818–845. He mentions the first encounter of the Muslims and the Byzantines near Gaza, about which there is a general agreement, and in which Sergius the Patricius of Caesarea, was killed (February 634). The next encounter between the Byzantines and the Muslims happened, according to Dionysius sources, in Jūsiya, near Ḥimṣ! The commander of the Byzantine army was Theodorus who, as we learn from the Arabic sources was killed either in Ajnādayn or in the Yarmūk, (depending which tradition is preferred). The next battle was between Khālid b. al-Walīd and the Byzantines that was also fought near Ḥimṣ in northern Syria. This is how the Patriarch describes the development of the war afterwards:

> After the Arabs had distinguished themselves in battle agains the Romans, they went to the region of Baalbek, destroying and sacking everything in their path; and Khālid b. al-Walīd, the emir, went with them. A certain Roman general who was called ...? appeared with 20,000 men and attacked the Arabs at al-Ajnādayn. Many arrows fell upon the Arabs and a large number of them and of their horses died; but when the battle grew fiercer the Romans were defeated and the general was killed. Khālid b. al-Walīd then led the Arab army to besiege Damascus. [...] While the Arab armies were besieging Damascus they received the news of Abū Bakr's death; he had reigned for two and a half years.[107]

From this description it is perfectly clear that the arena of all these battles was northern Syria, the vicinity of Damascus, Baalbek, and the Golan, that is to say, as I have suggested: on the northern part of Trans-Jordan and in proximity to the Syrian desert. Further on, Dionysius describes in great detail the battle of the Yarmūk. His description is on the whole similar to the standard one in the Arabic sources.[108] It should be remembered that Dionysius was already heavily influenced by the Arabic sources of the second half of the 8th century, but his are not necessarily the same sources used by the Arab writers, a fact which accords his compilation particular value, for it represents a combination of Arabic and Syriac sources prior to Balādhurī.

In this stage of our discussion, and granted that there are some touching points between the repertory of the war stories and the real events which took place during the Arab invasion to Syria, it is possible to infer from the hoard of the reports by Balādhurī, Ṭabarī and their followers that all the decisive battles of the Arab conquerors whichever size they actually had, were fought in Trans-Jordan. The ability of the Byzantine army to block the invasion was extremely limited; it was still unorganized, and did not have the backing of the local population. These were the main reasons for the collapse of the Syrian defensive system, which the Byzantine hastily assembled, after the Persian wars. And when this happened, with Trans-Jordan in their hands already from the first year of the invasion, the Muslims had no problem to take over the whole of Syria including Western Palestine without encountering any real resistance.

CRITICISM OF THE SOURCES

Until recently modern research accepted the general framework of the conquest of Syria presented in the Arabic sources. If there were some contradictions or differences here and there, in some details, it was because the descriptions of the battles, and the stories of the heroic deeds of individuals crystallized in two sets of traditions or, as the scholars like to call them, in two "schools." These two groups of traditions, which are quoted by Ṭabarī[109] contain stories about the feats of heroism in the battles of Ajnādayn, Fiḥl, Yarmūk, Wāqūṣah-Yāqūṣah, and in a few other places. One of these "schools" was named "the school of Madinah" mainly because it represents the traditions collected by Ibn Isḥāq (d. 151/768) and Wāqidī (d. 207/823); a similar type of tradition is mentioned with it – that of Balādhurī (d. 279/892) who quotes independent sources including some original Syrian ones. The second school is the one which is called "the school of Iraq," that relies mainly on the traditions of Sayf b. ʿUmar (d. 180/796). It has been claimed that this "school," namely Sayf's tradition, earned the complete confidence of Ṭabarī and his followers. The school of Ibn Isḥāq and Balādhurī dated the battle of the Yarmūk in 15/636; Sayf's tradition in Ṭabarī asserts that the battle of the Yarmūk took place in the year 13 before Ajnādayn[110] that took place only in the year 15,[111] or even after the fall of Caesarea. This tradition was copied by all the historians after Ṭabarī, such as Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) in his book *al-Kāmil fī at-Taʾrīkh*, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) in his book *al-ʿIbar wa-Dīwān al-Mubtadaʾ wa-al-Khabar*; Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) in his *al-Bidāyah wa-an-Nihāyah,*[112] and many others, although all of them similar to Ṭabarī, quote Ibn Isḥāq's parallel tradition, according to which the battle of Ajnādayn took place in 28 Jumādā I the year 13 is also recorded. However, in all events, according to Ṭabarī's traditions (as I have already pointed out) the battle of Ajnādayn was

fought twice, in the years 13 and 15, whereas the Yarmūk battle was fought only once, in the year 13![113]

As we shall soon see there is no real basis for the theory of the "schools;" for all that we possess is a literary genre of war stories, "*Ayyām*," and one group of stories is no more credible than the other. As it happens war stories were magnified throughout the ages and lost their organic relation to the reality of the events themselves. The battle day shifted over a long period, and every group of *ayyām* stories that were adapted to the events of the Arab conquests, had its own days of battle. It is superfluous to say that in such a literary genre there can be no agreement between the various stories about the dates in general, and definitely not about the day in the week (Saturday or Monday) nor about the exact month (Rajab, Jumādā I, Jumādā II, Dhū al-Qaʿdah), nor about the day in the month. This is true for all the accounts about the battle of Ajnādayn, the battle of the Yarmūk and other battles.

The research literature in general opted for Balādhurī's account which was identified with the "school of Madinah." De Goeje, who dedicated a whole book to the conquest of Syria, made a particular effort to prove the weakness of the "Iraqi school," and in addition to determining the exact site of Ajnādayn in Western Palestine he also fixed the dates of the decisive battles, and even made a particular effort to prove that the 28th in Jumādā II in the year AH 13 was on Saturday.[114] After he published his study, Balādhurī became the favourite and almost all subsequent researchers preferred him to Ṭabarī as the major source for the Islamic conquests. All the Muslim writers who followed Ṭabarī were, as a result, depicted as less reliable than Balādhurī. Support for this view came from the direction of some important writers such as Ibn ʿAsākir who dealt in great detail with the traditions about Ajnādayn and Yarmūk, Ibn Saʿd and a few others.[115]

In the non-Muslim sources, there is no less confusion, and it can be assumed that in most cases the stories reached the Christian writers from Muslim sources. However, it must be stressed that in each one of these (non-Muslim) sources there are details which do not exist in any Muslim source. I have already referred above to some of these sources. Mention should be made at this point to Agapius (Agapios) the Bishop of Manbij (Maḥbūb b. Qusṭanṭīn, d. c. 950). He relates that a great battle took place on the Yarmūk in the 22nd year of Heraclius or 943 according to the Seleucian calendar, (of "Dhū al-Qarnayn") that is to say in 631 or the latest 632, and that the Arabs killed a large number of Byzantine soldiers.[116] There is no need to indulge too much into the question concerning the source for Agapius's story recorded as late as the 10th century, which brings the battle of the Yarmūk forward to the time of Muḥammad himself, though the Prophet himself is not mentioned in it. Who knows which *ayyām* story he heard or read?[117] An even

later Christian source, Michael I (the Syrian) the 12th-century Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch (d. 1199), reported that after the defeat of the Byzantines at Dāthin there was one battle prior to the battle of the Yarmūk. Leone Caetani, who quoted Michael the Syrian was convinced that this particular battle was the battle of Ajnādayn, although the site of the battle was not explicitly mentioned.[118] It is surprising since Michael I knew the battle of Yarmūk by name, why does he say nothing about another battle, which according to all the reports was of no less importance? I therefore repeat my argument that all the reports, traditions, stories (one may choose any of the attributes), either from the Muslims or the non-Muslim sources which had been influenced by the Arabic literature, such as these of Agapius and Michael I, represent a literary genre appealing to the imagination, telling a good story, delivering a moral teaching, and in the particular case of the Christian sources also expressing the renting strife in the church.[119] The aim of the stories in the Arabic sources was in addition to glorify the believers on the one hand and to humiliate the enemies on the other as well as to send a clear religious message about the truth of Islam whose successes on the battlefields should be attributed to Allah's ever-active support. Therefore, all the attempts to prefer one "school" of traditions over the other are baseless and futile. In other words, the stories of Ṭabarī that came from an "Iraqi source" are no more and no less reliable than the stories coming from other sources whichever name one gives them. Here and there, in Balādhurī for instance, it is possible to identify the last person from whom the writer heard his story, but we cannot know from where the story found its way to the ears of a storyteller in the middle of the 8th or 9th century. Places and dates are good frameworks for a story (or a legend?). It is not surprising, that in time when the stories were-spread around by the *qaṣṣās*, the storytellers of folk stories and *ayyām*, the stories about the heroic period of Islam were connected with concrete place names, and if needed there were some storytellers who could even show these places "on the map," so to speak. Only that the "maps" were not always identical, as we have seen in the case of Ajnādayn.

In short, if in the 12th century Michael the Syrian does not exactly know to identify the battle in the tradition which he quotes, it is very possible that this particular tradition contained neither place names nor date. However, it is no less reliable than a story which contains not only the exact date and place but even the hour of the day in which the battle took place, such as the tradition quoted by al-Azdī who says that the battle of Ajnādayn took place on Saturday exactly "in the middle of the day."[120] Nuwayrī calculated and found that only one month separated between the battles of Ajnādayn and the Yarmūk.[121] And if one wishes to know what happened to the Iraqi tradition, this one too can be found in Nuwayrī's book locating Ajnādayn close to the conquest of Bethshean (Baysān) in the year 15.[122] Nuwayrī, just like Michael I and all the other writers, copied whatever he

found in front of him, and in spite of the fact that he was a serious Muslim historian, especially regarding the events which took place nearer to his time in the late Middle Ages, he could not do much when he had to deal with the literary sources which he encountered. Ibn Khaldūn faced the same situation and in spite of his sensitivity as a historian, followed the already established methods, and copied the same traditions. Some of these later writers tried here and there to apply some tools of criticism, but they also came to understand that the critical methods cannot be applied to this kind of literature. Similar to any lover of literature they must have enjoyed the texts of the stories about the heroic deeds of the ancients, and they might even have believed what was reported in them; they must have been excited like any other Muslim by the manifestation of Allah's greatness and dominion over his world and from the role which He prescribed for them to play in it; a role that they performed most perfectly. Is there any surprise, therefore, that among the stories about the conquest of Syria there are some that remind us of the Biblical: "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Exodus, 14:14)?

Many stories put into the mouths of Byzantine leaders, including Heraclius himself, confessions and admissions that the Byzantines had no hope against the Muslims, who drew their power from following Allah's path and fulfilling His commandments. Thus for instance, Ibn Kathīr improvises on a tradition by Ṭabarī about a pre-battle consultation between Heraclius and his officers, quoting word for word the discussion which took place in the Emperor's headquarters, as if the storyteller was present there to record it. This is not something unusual if we regard this tradition, like many others, as a *qiṣṣah* – a story told by a *qaṣṣāṣ*, who by quoting dialogues impressed his audience and introduced credibility and dramatic elements into his performance. (Note the dialogues in the Qurʾān such as in Sūrah 12 defined as "the fairest of stories.") In that particular discussion Heraclius said to his officers that he had decided to leave Syria even before the war began, because he perceived the spiritual superiority of the Muslims and was convinced of the inherent truth of the Prophet's message: "My friends," Heraclius said, "these (Muslims) possess a new religion, and nobody would be able to overcome them. Listen to me, and make an agreement with them on some conditions [such as] half the taxes of ash-Shām." The Emperor continued his advice to his commanders as if they were independent owners of Syria, saying that if they followed his advice they will be left with the mountains of ar-Rūm, but if they ignored his words, "they would take away from you Syria and trouble you (even) in the mountains of ar-Rūm." Naturally, the storyteller also knows what was the exact reaction of the officers: "They reacted to this by snorting like wild asses, as it was their habit, being ignorant and possessing little knowledge in (the art of) war and (finding) support in religion and earthly matters." According to this story following this

reaction, Heraclius threw his army into battle (of the Yarmūk) against his will,[123] left for Ḥimṣ, and soon after, according to another version, he saddled his mule and left Syria forever on his way to Constantinople.[124]

As I have already hinted, there is no need for too much imagination in order to perceive that this literary piece is completely legendary with a similar message as that found in many other literary creations in which the Emperor acknowledges the greatness of the Prophet, the power of his mission and the sublime truth of the Islamic religion. In principal, there is no difference between these stories and the stories about the conquest of Syria that have the appearance of historical records, which contain identification of places and indication of dates. For Balādhurī also recorded a tradition according to which the Emperor having heard about the defeat of his army in the battle of the Yarmūk rode his horse and before leaving Syria forever he said exactly this: "Farwell O Syria, what a good country you are for the enemy!"[125] The names of people and places as well as exact dates give the impression of truth. However, when reading these stories, it is clear that there is nothing easier than to match war and battle stories to particular events, decorating the adaptation with names and dates.

Another aspect of these literary trends that characterizes the stories about the conquests is specifically connected to the persons who took part in the various events. Also in this case there are many variations of the stories, and there is no reason to prefer one version to the other. As I have noted at the beginning of this essay, the fact that there is a story about certain people who took part in a certain battle or in a certain decisive event does not necessarily mean that it contains any real information either about the event or about those who participated in it. Thus for example in the stories about the conquest of Syria we find one tradition which says that the commander of the Muslim forces in the battle of Ajnādayn was Khālid b. al-Walīd, and next to it a variant which says that ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ was the supreme commander, and yet another one that it was Abū ʿUbaydah – depending on the interested side that wished to disseminate its own particular version of the event. All that was needed was to make small adjustments introducing some details into the already existing pattern-story, which originally had nothing to do with Ajnādayn or with any of the persons mentioned in the final version.[126] Probably the nearest description of multitudes of nomads invading the settled land is found in the tradition which says that there were many commanders in the invading Arab force, and that each one of them was the head of his soldiers (*wa-al-ʿumarāʾ kull ʿalā jundihi*).[127]

On the face of it this tradition (which I have partly analyzed about in another context speaks about an orderly army whose columns advanced under commanders who had been nominated by the Caliph. True, this tradition developed throughout the ages, and it represents the wish of the Arab writers to show that the

wars of the conquests were organized by, and directed from, one centre, thus establishing the authority of the Caliphate. However, in the heart of it the tradition hides the original story, about invading Bedouins lead by their tribal leaders or by a head nominated by the tribal head to lead his tribesmen in the field.

The same can be said about the other participants in the battles, and those that died in them. As time passed, and the traditions about the conquests crystallized and took their shapes, there were many people who wished to place their ancestors in the heart of the events of the heroic age in Islamic history, the age of the creation of the empire, and particularly into the glorious wars of the Islamic conquest. It is, therefore, not a mere coincidence that we find names of famous people taking part in the wars and more particularly in the great decisive battles. This tendency is not unusual and it is not unique only to Islam. Great events in the history of any nation always attract many people to participate and even play a crucial part in them. There is not one great historical personality with whom a great many people did not claim to have rubbed shoulders. This is how stories about events that had never happened and about meetings which had never taken place are born. It is similar to what happens nowadays when onlookers manage to push their faces into camera frame next to an important personality, and years later speak with nostalgia about the unusual friendship with that particular personality, who actually had no idea even about their existence. Their children and grandchildren, later, would carry on the "tradition" and relate about the participation of their ancestors in the crucial events with which that personality was connected, and so on and so forth. The same applies to the description of the events themselves. The more the event is glorified, the more the importance of those who had taken part in it is magnified. We have therefore two directions in the creation of a "tradition:" One, is the amplification of the event, and the other the identification of the participants in them, according to the aims of the parties interested in these identifications.

How big were the battles that took place in Syria one can probably learn from the numbers of the casualties in these battles as they were recorded in the traditions. I have already said at the beginning of this discussion that numbers which appear in the stories about the sizes of the fighting forces are completely worthless.[128] I am giving here the example concerning the number of casualties only in order to illustrate the character of these literary forms. The stories speak about huge numbers of fighters – the Muslims always numbering at least one quarter of the Byzantines facing them. Thus in Ajnādayn 20,000–25,000 Muslim defeated 100,000 Byzantine soldiers.[129] In the battle of Yarmūk the number jumped to almost one quarter of a million Byzantines defeated by about 40,000 Muslims.

The purpose of these imaginative numbers[130] is to show that these battles were huge ones in which the few believers fought the many non-believers: these

were the battles of Allah against His enemies. However, assuming that the Byzantines used no less deadly weapons than the weapons used by the Arabs, and knowing that in medieval battles in which only a few thousand from each side took part, there were many casualties between dead and wounded (many whom subsequently died from their injuries) on both sides – the victorious and the vanquished – the Islamic traditions about the casualties, look ridiculous. According to these traditions about the decisive battles, only a few Muslims were killed in the huge encounters which involved hundreds of thousands. In the battle of Ajnādayn Balādhurī counted by name fourteen dead.[131] (I am sure that it is not coincidence that the number of Muslims who were killed in the Battle of Badr, the first battle of the Prophet against Quraysh, was also fourteen! (Ibn Hishām, Cairo 1955, pp. 706–707).) Ibn Isḥāq who was interested only in *ḥadīth* transmitters says that only two died and according to the sources of Khalīfah all in all five lost their lives in Ajnādayn.[132]

As time passed the *shahādah*, martyrdom, which was the title bestowed on the fallen in the wars of conquests, and the Holy War in general, entitled the people to a dignified status and probably also to some financial income. It is therefore understandable why certain families and political figures vied for such a position, namely having the names of their ancestors mentioned among the fallen in the heroic battles in the war of the conquests. And since *shahīds* of this kind were not too abundant it is clear why we have so many versions of the battle stories and the disagreements between the various writers about the identities of the fallen.[133]

Thus for instance it related that Abbān b. Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ was killed in Ajnādayn;[134] he was killed again in the Yarmūk,[135] as well as in Marj aṣ-Ṣuffar.[136] According to another story he was not killed at all, but injured in the battle of the Yarmūk.[137] He also appears alive and well in the time of Caliph ʿUthmān, and at the latter's order reads a version of the Qurʾān to Zayd b. Thābit.[138] About Ḥārith b. Hishām b. al-Mughīrah it is reported that he was definitely killed in the battle of Ajnādayn,[139] but according to another report he reappears very much alive later when Bethshean (Baysān) was taken;[140] and another story says that he took part in the battles of Ajnādayn and Fiḥl (Pela) and died in the plague of ʿAmawās five or six years later.[141] There is also a version which says that he was injured or killed in the battle of Yarmūk.[142] What exactly happened to these or other people we shall never know. It is evident that all these stories relate to important personalities; all of them *ṣaḥābah*, belonging to the age of the Prophet, and the storytellers made an effort (not always free of charge) to find for each one of them a proper martyrdom. It is possible to bring many more examples of this kind; they all support the structure of my argument that the war-stories were like other stories, an integral part of the repertoire of the *qaṣṣāṣ*, the professional storytellers, who

could adapt a good story to any event. As I have already hinted this matching or adaptation is probably the only contact point between the *qiṣṣah* and history.

The storyteller, (*qāṣṣ* or *qaṣṣās*, and in modern time (colloquial): *ḥakawātī*), was not a long time ago a very common phenomenon in the East, and he fulfilled the task of a one-man-theatre. He used to appear in public in front of a gathered crowd, tell his stories and play the part of all his heroes. In a society with very little amusement he was a source of amusement, and for most of his audience he also was a source of historical information, since "historical" stories and tales were taken as true facts. Next to him, (sometimes it was he himself), was the *rāwī*, the custodian of the tribal lore who stored in his memory and narrated the stories about his tribe's feats. In the narratives of the *rāwī*, unlike the stories of the *qaṣṣāṣ*, there was, on the whole, an element of historical information; however, this information too, is not easily identified or focused in a particular point of time. In the stories of the *qaṣṣāṣ*, and the narrations of the *rāwī*, the wars, and the exciting days of the battle, *ayyām*, occupied an important place. In these heroic stories, the exaggeration was obligatory. This is why the stories repeat themselves about tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of enemy soldiers defeated by a handful of heroes or even by single men of valour who stood alone against the enemy forces, or killed his best fighters in duels (*mubārazah*). What was left for the storyteller to do was only to change the names of the participants.[143] It is not difficult to see how the *qaṣṣāṣ* stories assumed, in time, fixed literary forms, in which the poem occupied an important place, and so it happened that these forms developed into becoming "historical" or chronological literature.

It is not surprising that the Prophet defined Sūrat Yūsuf (XII) in the Qurʾān as the "the best of stories" (*aḥsan al-qaṣaṣ*),[144] the same expression, in various forms, relates in the Qurʾān to all the events of the past. Thus almost invariably all the stories of the prophets preceding Muḥammad are called *qaṣaṣ*, and a whole Sūrah in the Qurʾān dealing with the story of Pharaoh and Moses is called the "Sūrah of the Stories" (*al-Qaṣaṣ*, XXVIII). The verb *qaṣṣa* and its derivations is solely used to relate the events of the past (e.g. Q, 4:163–164; 6:130; 7:35; 7:176; 11:100; 12:111 and many more). The Qurʾān even makes it clear that the *qiṣṣah*, the story, had a message attached to it: "In these stories is surely a lesson to men possessed of mind." (Q, 12:111) The Prophet was aware of the fact that his audiences had heard many times the stories about Joseph and Moses, and about similar heroes of the past. The novelty in his recounting, was the bestowing of authenticity on these stories ("it is not a forged tale, but confirmation of what was before it … and guidance, and a mercy to a people who believe." Q, 12:111. trans. Arberry) In other words, in the case of his stories – the Prophet says – Allah is the source of the *qiṣṣah*, which the he only repeats. The ordinary amusing and gripping

performance of the storyteller is transformed into the authoritative word of God brought to the people through the prophetic act – *waḥy*.

In the stories about the battles in the wars of the conquests we find all the elements of the qiṣaṣ – the customary exaggerations, the personal heroic feats interwoven into the general story, the obligatory literary theme of the few against the many; the emphasis on the humiliation of the enemy, the magnification of the Arab victory over the enemy by further giving prominence to the fact that the enemy leaders held very high ranks, and noble descent such as Theodorus the Emperor's brother, (emphasis: "full brother from father and mother"), who led the Byzantine army in Ajnādayn, and Arṭabūn, leading them also in the Yarmūk (and also vice versa). The Arab *qaṣṣāṣ* could not pronounce properly the strange Greek and Roman names, and were definitely unfamiliar with differences between a proper name, a title of nobility or a term describing an office. (Not that it was important for the development of the story or to the listeners.) In general the misrepresentation (either orally or in writing) of foreign names, and the tendency to give such names Arab forms are very common among Arab speakers and in Arabic literature to this very day. In our case, names and titles with foreign sounds that had been deformed beyond recognition were scattered in abundance in the various traditions and lent the stories an air of truth and reliability. The participation of Theodore, Theodorus (Theodoric, whom the Arab storyteller calls Tadāriq the Emperor's "full brother"[145]) at least in one of the major battles in Syria is very possible, and one may find confirmation to this in the Greek sources. It is understandable that a victory over the Emperor's brother is a very significant achievement, and therefore the presence of Theodorus in one of the two battles, and, even better, in both of them, is almost inevitable. In Ṭabarī's version the commander of the Byzantine army at Ajnādayn was Arṭabūn.[146] This is not a personal name but a title or a description of a function. In this form, this word is known to us from the Babylonia Talmud,[147] and the commentators are divided about it, whether it is a mispronunciation or a local rendition of *tribunus* among the Aramaeic speakers,[148] or a misnomer Greek *athreon* (in the meaning of the overseer or inspector).[149] In this case, however, it seems more likely that it is the mispronunciation of the *tribunus*, an officer in the Byzantine army of the period who commanded a *numerus*, a battalion numbering 200 to 400 soldiers.

The foreign names should not be taken at face value in the Arabic sources unless there is an independent support from other documents which enable comparison that could lead to an accurate reading (if the names are not the sheer invention of the storyteller). Without such independent documents it is very difficult to identify such names as Jirjah in Thūdar or ibn Būdhīhā,[150] who is said to have converted to Islam in the midst of the battle of the Yarmūk,[151] or al-Durāqis (or al-Qīqār) ibn Naṣṭūrs.[152] With a stretch of the imamgination it is possible to

identify al-Durāqiṣ (Darāqiṣ, Darfāṣ?) with *Drungarius* the title of the Byzantine general who commanded one of the four corpuses of the army.[153] Al-Qīqār ibn Nasṭūrs is a hodge-podge of names and titles that the storytellers gave them, some sort of Arab forms. Al-Qīqār belongs to a family of names and titles distorted beyond recognition such as al-Qabuqlār,[154] al-Qanuqlār,[155] as-Saflār (Suflār?) the eunuck of Heraclius,[156] as well as al-Ghanfār or al-Qīqlān, who according to Ibn Kathīr, quoting Ibn Isḥāq, is none other than Nasṭūrs the eunuch of Heraclius.[157] All these names (being only a few of many distortions), belong to the commander of the Byzantine army (or his deputy) in the stories of both the battles of Ajnādayn and the Yarmūk. The difference between the distortions of the Qanuqlār and Sa[n]flār enabled the storyteller, on whom Khalīfah based his report, to place the one in Ajnādayn and the other in the Yarmūk. By the way, because of the Arabic orthography it is possible to explain all the distortions quite easily. Also the name Nasṭūr that appears as the father of al-Qīqār, appears also as the name of Qabuqlār, which is possibly the nearest pronunciation of the original. Qabuqlār or Qabiqlār could well be the Arabic form of *cubicularius*, a high-ranking eunuch who accompanied the emperor on his journeys (originally, a chamber-servant).

The storytellers at the Bedouin bonfires in the public squares, in the market places, in the houses of the rich and noblemen and wherever a group of listeners gathered, strove to clothe their stories with credible attire, and used various methods to present them as true descriptions of events, not just as amusing tales. In order to add to the exciting stories the colour of true events, the *qaṣṣāṣ* supplied many details: names of places, names of people and dates whether these details had any basis in the story itself or not. The indication of the day of the week, the hour in the day, to say nothing about the month and the year (as we have seen in the examples above), and many foreign names made a great impression on the audiences, and were regarded as unquestionable proof to the truth of the story and the reliability of the storyteller. However, when the latter was unable to supply names he turned the whole story into an anonymous affair, and used unbinding expressions such as "someone," "one person," and so on. Such an anonymic method of reporting appears also in the Qur'ān. It enables us to have an insight into the variations of storytelling in the time of the Prophet, and point to the fact that the stories, reached Muḥammad not from Biblical or any other written sources, but from local storytellers. Thus, for instance, in the story about the coronation of Ṭālūt (rhymes with Jālūt and identified with King Saul), the name of the Prophet (Samuel, in the Bible) from whom the Children of Israel asked a king, was unknown to the *qāṣṣ* who told the story, and therefore the Qur'ān says only that he was "their prophet."[158] The same we encounter in the story about the selling of Joseph. The name of the brother who prevented the killing of Joseph, was also unknown to the storyteller (in the Bible it is Reuben) and therefore he is

mentioned as "one of them."[159] The qaṣṣ also did not know the name of Potiphar, Pharaoh's captain of the guard" (King James Bible), so he referred to him as "he who bought him."[160] One may assume that the pattern in which names, particularly foreign ones, rhymed with each other was common among storytellers: Thus in addition to Jālūt and Ṭālūt[161] the Qurʾān has such rhymes as Hārūn and Qarūn,[162] Hārūt and Mārūt,[163] and obviously the pair ʿĪsā and Mūsā.

When one encounters a few variants of a story describing an event, particularly a battle of great importance such as one of the decisive battles, one may almost certainly assume that these were independent stories of various qaṣṣāṣ, that in the compilations of the chroniclers became variants on the same theme.[164] If there is similarity between the descriptions, it is not always certain that the "historians" copied from each other. There is a reasonable possibility that they all drew from the same reservoir of widespread stories that reached not only the Arabs or the Muslims in general, but crossed religious, linguistic, and cultural boundaries and reached the Jews and the Christians as well. Consequently we find similar stories in the Jewish homiletic literature as well as in the Qurʾān and its interpretation which is based on the *ḥadīth*.

This does not mean that Muḥammad spent time at a *Yeshivah* in Madinah, or that in Madinah and other places there were Jewish *midrash* sages who "taught" him. Rather, the *midrash* and Muḥammad as well as the early Muslim tradition drew their material from similar or identical sources, from the huge repertoire of stories that had been widespread in the East; and the same can be said about the early Islamic conquests.

It is not a coincidence that one of the arguments against Muḥammad was that he related the stories of the ancients that everyone had heard. The Prophet quotes the words of his adversaries who said: "We have already heard; if we wished, we could say the like of this; this is naught but the fairy-tales (*asāṭīr* vs. stories) of the ancients";[165] and even more emphatically: "Fairy-tales of the ancients that he has had written down, so that they are recited to him at dawn, and in the evening."[166]

In summing up, we can remove some of the views which have been common in the research of early Islam: First, the definitions of "schools" such as "the school of Madinah" (Ibn Isḥāq, Wāqidī) and the School of Iraq (Sayf b. ʿUmar). Second, within the removal of the "schools," the abolishment of the customary preference of one school (that of Madinah) over the other, as Wellhausen did. In their own way Albrecht Noth and Patricia Crone already dealt with this issue in detail.[167] Third, the idea that a certain source gains particular credibility if it contains a story that had already been put into writing. There is no difference whatsoever between a tradition that was transmitted orally or in writing.[168] A written story is not necessarily more reliable than an oral one, for we have to be aware of the fact that the historical literature about early Islam is no more than tendentious

belles lettres, composed or compiled a long time after the events took place. Its main interest was not to seek the truth about these events, but to supply dramatic descriptions, and to fulfill another purpose either social, religious, or moral. This is why we find in these stories recurrent literary motifs, dialogues, anecdotes about the bravery of certain individuals, speeches, exchange of letters between principal heroes whether Arabs or Byzantines, schematization of the events emphasizing the ultimate Islamic truth and the high moral standards of the early Muslims. For the latter purpose, for example, we find the story about the Arab spy who was sent by the Byzantines to the camp of the Muslims and returned with a report about their moral superiority, emphasizing that "they are hermits by night and lions by day," and that all of them are equal before the law. This report convinced the commander, or even the Emperor himself, that the Muslim's victory was certain.[169] Since the sources for the reports about the Muslim conquest of Syria were collections of qaṣṣāṣ stories that belong to the genre of popular literature – many of which contain common motifs and similar anecdotes found not only in Arab but also in other societies and cultures – it means that the final product of the authors who are regarded to be the ultimate historians of early Islam, Ibn Isḥāq, Wāqidī, Balādhurī, Ṭabarī, is no more than a form of historical *adab*. This was a type of literature that developed particularly under the ʿAbbāsids, and transformed the *qiṣaṣ* into historical documents. In these literary creations the memory of the past is made up of anecdotes representing various motifs and topics, and the literary structure organizes them into a main plot in such a way that leads the reader (or the listener) to a dramatic climax.[170]

So what are we left with from all the stories about conquests? Do we know if the battles of Ajnādayn, Yarmūk and even Yāqūṣah were separate and independent ones? Isn't it possible that they were all but one battle that multiplied as it went through the mouths of the storytellers, and that this one battle took place in Trans-Jordan. Or is it possible that the military activities during the invasion did not follow one another involving each time the whole fighting power on both sides, but that one group of the Muslims engaged a group of Byzantine soldiers in one place while, at the same time, another group fought separately the Byzantine elsewhere. If the fighting could take place both in Iraq and Syria concurrently then it is not far-fetched to assume that several, and separate groups of Arab-fighters were present independently and concurrently in various parts of Syria, particularly since there was no substantial Byzantines army stationed in the country. One of the most impressive testimonies for such a situation is Sophronius the Patriarch of Jerusalem's sermon on Christmas of 634 (still full of hope), speaking about the Arabs in the vicinity of Jerusalem and Bethlehem,[171] before the date suggested for the battle of Ajnādayn.

It is clear that the invading Arabs, finding Syria undefended and still in turmoil could easily penetrate both Western and Eastern Palestine. However, it is reasonable (as I have already pointed out a few times above) that most of the fighting force was in the east around Ḥawrān, and backed by the desert. The battlefields of Ajnādayn, Yarmūk and Yāqūṣah are all not far away from the steep cliffs of the Ruqād, and whether these were the sites of three separate battles or only one which was later divided by traditions into three, there is no question that they (or it) were far smaller than in the stories which describe them. In these battles (or battle) the invaders succeeded quite easily to overcome, the small companies of Byzantine soldiers that had been stationed in the country or were hastily sent down from the northern front, but the imagination, and the need for a good story with an authentic flavour turned them into giant battles.

It may be assumed that strategically speaking, the cliffs of the Yarmūk and the Ruqād were very good places for the reconstruction of a defense-line against Bedouin incursions from the south, endangering the heart of Syria, namely the urban line of Damascus, Ḥumṣ and Ḥamāt. It is therefore possible that the limited Byzantine forces, even if we assumed that they were reinforced by soldiers from the Persian front, did not spread themselves thinly but chose to establish a line of defense along these canyons. The fact that all the fortified towns and most of the coastal towns capitulated quickly and with minimal resistance means that even if such a line of defense actually existed, it swiftly became apparent that it was useless. There is no point in deciding when exactly each battle took place, or when one battle occurred which was greater than the others, or whether a battle described by the sources ever happened. At the end of the story, Syria's fate was sealed not following the encounters between the Arab invaders and the Byzantine army but mainly because the fortified cities with their mighty walls readily opened their gates, and the country in general, save the particularly mountainous areas, received the Arabs willingly, and in many places even happily.

All the rest, the heroic deeds and actions of valour, the mighty and great battles and exciting duals, the central control of the Caliphs and their close supervision of the battles, the fiery speeches, the clever acts of cheating and deception in the battlefields, the wise and brilliant verbal exchanges between the Muslims and their enemies as well as among themselves, the miracles which happened during the battles, all these and many more belong to the repertoire of folklore. There is definitely a place for a systematic study of the literary motifs which appear in the traditions about the conquest of Syria against similar motifs which appear in the folklore of the other world cultures.

NOTES

1. Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Jābir al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, (ed. Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn Munajjid), Cairo 1956, p. 145.
2. M. Sharon, "Processes of destruction and nomadization in Palestine under Islam," in *idem* (ed.), *Studies in the History of Palestine under Islam*, Jerusalem, 1976, pp. 7–32. (Hebrew) B. Z. Kedar, "The Arab conquest and the settled land a testimony of an apocalypse from the 7th century," in M. Tuch and D. Mandels (eds.), *The German border of the Roman Empire*, Jerusalem 1995, p. 9, n.1. (Hebrew)
3. Balādhurī (above n.1) p. 168.
4. Chr. von. Schönborn, *Sophron de Jérusalem: Vie monastique et Confession dogmatique*, Paris 1972, pp. 89–90. F. M. Abel, "La Prise de Jérusalem par les Arabs," *Conférences de Saint Etienne 1910–1911*, Paris 1912.
5. Schönborn, *op. cit.* (n.4) pp. 90–91.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 91. Schönborn quotes Abel's French translation (n.4 above), p. 120.
7. Kedar (above n.2), p. 11.
8. Quoted *ibid*, p. 11, from *Pirkei de Rabbī Eliezer, Horev*, 9, 1948, pp. 193–194.
9. *Nistarot de Rabbī Shimʿon bar Yoḥāy* (*Mysterien des R. Simon ben Jochai*, ed. A. Jellinek), *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 3, Leipzig 1853, p. 79. B. Lewis, "An apocalyptic vision of Islamic history," in *idem*, *Studies in Classical and Ottoman Islam*, Variorum reprints, London 1976, no. V, pp. 308–338; revised version in *idem*, *On History, Collected Studies*, (ed. Rachel Simon), Jerusalem 1988, pp. 194–214. (Hebrew)
10. Lewis, *ibid.*, (1988), p. 202.
11. S. P. Brock, "Syriac views of emergent Islam," *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, (ed. G. H. A. Juynboll), Carbondale 1982, p.11–12.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
13. See in detail J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, Leiden 1972, pp. 22–26 and notes.
14. See also *ibid.*., p. 24.
15. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, (ed. ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Wāfī), Cairo 1376/1957, 1, pp. 219–220.
16. J. B. Bury, *History of the later Roman Empire*, 2, New York 1958, pp. 75–77; R. Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization*, London 1961, p. 138.
17. W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Cambridge 1992, p. 93 and note 22.
18. Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Princeton 1987, *passim*, index.
19. Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʿqūb, Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Taʾrīkh* (al-Yaʿqūbī), Beirut 1992, 1, pp. 206–207.
20. Note the great impression which the visit of the Ghassānid King al-Ḥārith b. Jablah in 563 left on the Byzantine court in Constantinople. Al-Ḥārith received from the Emperor not only the title of King of all the Arabs in Syria, but also the two important titles of Phylarch and Patricius, the latter being second only to the Emperor himself. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical history*, London 1860, p. 174.
21. *EI*, *s.v.* "Ghassān."
22. There are some suggestions that here and there they had "desert palaces" in which classical Greek-Roman architecture was employed. However, it seems more likely that all the "palaces" attributed to them were built by the Umayyads or in their time. See, K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, London 1958, pp. 139–140.
23. I. Hasson, "Judhām entre la Jāhiliyya et l'Islam," *SI*, 81 (1995), pp. 20–25 and n. 123.
24. Qurʾān, 9:30.
25. Many studies were dedicated to ʿUzayr in the Qurʾān. The problem has, however, a wider connotation, since it relates to the identity of the "Jews" whom Muḥammad met. I believe that this single verse contains the key to the solution of the problem of this identity. In

almost all the interpretations and studies, there is one major line of thought that starts with the certain identification of ʿUzayr with Ezrah. Since this identification was taken for granted, the scholars and the exegetes discussion concentrated on searching for as much material as possible to back it. Very few scholars veered away from the pairing of ʿUzayr with Ezrah. The whole issue is rather strange, to say the least. The mere idea that the Jews believed that God had a son, particularly after the appearance of Christianity in which the divinity of Jesus is an article of faith, is absurd. And as to Ezrah ("the scribe") why should the Jews call him in such a strange diminutive form ʿUzayr (why not ʿUzayrah?). If he is the Son of God why not use his name in full, why make him small? But more important why don't we have one word on the subject in the pre-Islamic Hebrew sources? The truth of the matter is that there is no Ezrah or anything which is connected with him. Somewhere along the line the identification was made, got entrenched, and became a subject of serious research and hairsplitting discussions. The Qur'ānic verse refers to inter-Christian debate regarding the attributes of Jesus. I found support for my theory in the usage which the Qur'ān does in the verb *ʿazara*. In Sūrah 48 verse 9 we read: "You may believe in Allah and succour Him ..." Arberry used the word "succour" to translate the Arabic "*tuʿazzirūhū*, which reminds us of the Hebrew *taʿazrūhu* "you will help Him ..." The Arabic verb (ʿ-Z-R) in the second form (*ʿazzarūhu*) appears in the Qur'ān three times: one just quoted and again in Sūrah 5 verse 12 and Sūrah 7 verse 157. Its meaning is not the usual meaning of this form of verb in Arabic, which is connected with reproach and punishment, but rather in the meaning of help and support, which is exactly the meaning in Hebrew. The only other time in which the root ʿ-Z-R appears in the Qur'ān is in the word ʿUzayr. In other words the Qur'ānic linguistic usage supports my theory that the Qur'ānic verse deals with differences of opinion about the name describing Jesus: is he *ʿOzer* (Arabic pronunciation: *ʿUzayr*) or is he *Mashiyaḥ* (Aramaic: *Mshiḥa* Arabic: *Masīḥ*), namely, is he "Helper and Saviour" (Heb. *ʿOzer umoshiyaʿ* or is he the "Annointed" (Christ). This is more or less what can be said about the "Jews of Muḥammad" – a certain group of believers in Jesus who were distinguished from the other "messianic" Christians, and called *Yahūd*. Everything else consists of the stories of later authors who were very far from the time of the Prophet but met Rabbinical Jews in the conquered lands and projected whatever they saw among the Jews of their time to the past. Their testimonies, therefore, have very little value, for the time of the Prophet, or for the period that preceded him, particularly as far as "the Jews" of his time are concerned. See a summary article of classical attitude to ʿUzayr ("Ezrah"), which reviews all the literature, H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Ezra-ʿUzayr: The Metamorphosis of a Polemical Motif," in *idem*, *Intertwined Worlds, Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, Princeton, NJ 1992, pp. 50–74. *Cf.* B. Heller, "ʿUzair," in *EI*.

26. M. Avi-Yonah, *Historical Geography of Palestine, from the End of the Babylonian Exile to the Arab Conquest*, third edition, Jerusalem 1962, pp. 173–178 (Hebrew).
27. On the Persian conquest see Z. Baras, "The Persian conquest and the twighlight of the Byzantine rule," in *idem et al.*, *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, Jerusalem 1982, 1, pp. 328 ff. (Hebrew).
28. See the summing-up in J. L. La Monte, *The World of the Middle Ages: A Reorientation of Medieval History*, New York 1949, pp. 68–70 and see in detail about the Slavic Avar front, J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 45–48.
29. Kaegi, (above n.17), p. 91.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
32. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (1), Cairo 1955, pp. 317 ff. al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. Wāqid, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, (ed. Marsden Jones), Oxford 1966, p. 607.
33. Wāqidī, *ibid.*, p. 755.
34. Ibn Hishām, (above n.32) p. 375.
35. Wāqidī, (above n.32), p. 756.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 760.

37. Baras, (above, n.27) pp. 341–345.
38. Balādhurī (above n.1), pp. 71–72 ff.
38a. S. D. Goitein, "Jerusalem in the Arab Period," in Lee I. Levine (ed.) *The Jerusalem Cathedra*, Jerusalem, and Detroit 1982, pp. 170–171. On Jews and Christian majority in Jerusalem, see, Muqaddasī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *Aḥsan at-Taqāsim*, Leiden 1906, p. 167.
39. Kaegi (above n.17), pp. 82 ff.
40. Balādhurī (above n.1) pp. 113 ff.
41. H. A. R. Gibb, "An interpretation of Islamic history," in *idem*, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, London 1962, p. 6.
42. Balādhurī (above n.1), p. 128.
43. F. M. Donner, "The growth of military institutions, in the early Caliphate and their relation to civilian authority," *Al-Qantara*, 14 (1993), esp. p. 313 and n.7.
44. Ibn Hishām (above n.32), p. 224.
45. Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-Makkī al-Haytamī, *Taṭhīr al-Janān wa-al-Lisān*, Cairo 1385/1965 p. 14.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
48. F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography,* Leiden 1968, pp. 30 ff.
49. I. Hasson, "Ansāb al-Ašrāf d'al-Balādhurī et-il un livre de ta'rīkh ou d'adab?" *IOS*, 19 (1999), pp. 491–492.
50. Balādhurī (above n.17), p. 88.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
52. Thus Kaegi (above n.17), pp. 92–93.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 92–93.
54. Muḥammad b. Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh ar-Rusul wa-al-Mulūk*, (ed. de Goeje) Leiden 1879–1901, 1, p. 2108.
55. Balādhurī (above n.1), p. 130.
56. R. Cohen, "The ancient routes from Petra to Gaza in view of the new discoveries," in E. Orion and J. Eini (eds.) *The Spice Routes*, Sde Boqer, 1991, pp. 45–58. (Hebrew)
57. Kaegi (above n.17) p. 92. (Balādhurī, *ibid.*)
58. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
59. Avi-Yonah (above n.26), p. 171. All the editors of Balādhurī did not pay attention to the mistake in the text and left the name of the place as Dubayyah or Dābiyah: what is needed, is only to move one diacritical point above the letter; the letter *bā'* becomes *nūn* and with it the true name of the place: Dāniyah = Danea.
60. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Ta'rīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 1, Damascus 1951, p. 498.
61. Balādhurī (above n.1), pp. 131–132.
62. This is the date of Easter 634=19 Ṣafar AH 13. See F. M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton 1981, p. 125.
63. See for instance, Balādhurī (above n.1), p. 131.
64. Yāqūt b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, Beirut 1374/1955, 5, p. 31, *s.v. Ma'āb*.
65. Balādhurī (above n.1), p. 134.
66. Ṭabarī (above n.54), p. 2108
67. Kaegi (above in n.17), pp. 83–85.
68. Balādhurī (above n.1), p. 165; and see also J. Sahas (above n.13), p. 23 and n.2.
69. See, for instance, the list in Balādhurī (above n.1), p. 135, and in great detail in Donner (above n.62), the appendices and their notes, pp. 356 ff.
70. Donner, *ibid.*
71. Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī: "The battle of Ajnādayn when and where did it take place? (*maʿrakat ajnādayn matā waqaʿat wa-ayna-waqaʿat*)," *Majallat al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī*, 2, (1951), pp. 102–167.
72. See Ṭabarī (above n.54), pp. 2090 f. (Yarmūk), 2125 f. (Ajnādayn), and both battles took place, according to these reports, at the same time. The battle of Ajnādayn is described

once again in 636, *ibid.*, pp. 2398–2401. On the other hand, Balādhurī (above n.1) pp. 135–136 (Ajnādayn), 160–162 (Yarmūk).

73. M. J. de Goeje, *Mémoire sur la conquête de la Syrie*, Leiden 1900, *passim*.
74. Kaegi (above n.17) p. 98. It should be noted that Kaegi tends to accept particularly the Arabic literary sources almost without any criticism while employing very frequently his sharp critical senses when, for example Byzantine sources are concerned.
75. Balādhurī (above n.1), p. 136.
76. Ṭabarī (above n.54), p. 2125.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 2091.
78. *Ibid.*, pp. 2125–2126.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 2090 ff.
80. See Sahas (above n.13).
81. S. D. Goitein, "The historical background of the erection of the Dome of the Rock," *JAOS*, 70 (1950), p. 106.
82. Yāqūt (above n.64), 1, p. 103. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam Mā Istaʿjam*, 1, Cairo 1364/1945, p. 14.
83. Ṭabarī (above n.54), p. 2125.
84. Yāqūt (above n.64), 3, p. 69.
85. See for example, Abū al-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-an-Nihāyah*, Beirut 1996, 5, pp. 66–81, 124–125; Shams ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ʿUthmān adh-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh al-Islām wa-Ṭabaqāt al-Mashāhīr wa-al-Aʿlām*, Cairo 1367, 1, pp. 374–378; Shihāb ad-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb an-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-ʿArab fī Funūn al-Adab*, Cairo 1973, 19, pp. 120–125.
86. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad, Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar wa-Dīwān al-Mubtadaʾ wa-al-Khabar* … Beirut 1971 (1956), 2, pp. 902, 948 following Ṭabarī (above n.54) p. 2125. Ṭabarī speaks about the movement of the Byzantine forces "from Jilliq to Ajnādayn."
87. Ibn Khaldūn, *ibid.*, addendum to vol. 2, p. 85.
88. Ṭabarī (above n.54), p. 2125.
89. G. Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, London 1890, pp. 258–265.
90. *EI*, *s.v.* "Djillik̡."
91. adh-Dhahabī (above n.85), 1, p. 375.
92. Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 5, (ed. S. D. Goitein) Jerusalem 1936, pp. 158–159.
93. Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab wa Maʿādin al-Jawhar* (ed. Pellat), Beirut 1970, 3, p. 299.
94. Leone Caetani, *Annali dell'Islam*, Milan 1905–1926, 2, p. 24–81, 3, pp. 28–31; de Goeje (above n.73), pp. 52–55; Kaegi (above n.17), p. 98 n.38; Donner (above n.62), p. 129; Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī (above n.71), pp. 90 ff.
95. Abū Muḥammad Aḥmad b. Aʿtham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, 1, Hyderabad 1968, p. 219.
96. Ibn Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī-Mamālik al-Amṣār*, Cairo 1342/1924, p. 216.
97. Yāqūt (above n.64) 3, p. 135.
98. Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Abī Bakr al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-Ishārāt ilā-Maʿrifat az-Ziyārāt*, (ed. Janine Sourdel-Thomine), Damascus 1953, p. 16.
99. This had already been noted by Abraham N. Polak in his *History of the Arabs*, Jerusalem 1945, p. 81. (Hebrew)
100. Yaʿqūbī (above n.19), 2, p. 134.
101. See Moshe Gil, *Palestine in the early Muslim period* (634–1099), 1, *Historical Studies*, Tel Aviv 1983, p. 35. (Hebrew)
102. Donner (above n.43) and the notes there.
103. See also Ṭabarī (above n.54) p. 2127
104. *Ibid.*, pp. 2111–2112.
105. A Palmer and S. Brock, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, Liverpool 1993, pp. 18–19.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

107. *Ibid.*, pp. 148–150; the quotation on pp. 149–150.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
109. Ṭabarī (above n.54), pp. 2125, 2396 ff.
110. *Ibid.*, pp.2090 f.
111. *Ibid.*, pp. 2396–2398.
112. ʿIzz ad-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Karam Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī at-Taʾrīkh*, 2, Beirut 1982, pp. 410–418, 498; Ibn Khaldūn (above n.86) pp. 900–901, 948; and see Ibn Kathīr (above n.85), pp. 68 f.
113. Ṭabarī (above n.54) p. 2090.
114. De Goeje (above n.73), p. 51.
115. Ibn ʿAsākir (above n.60), pp. 479–483; Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb aṭ- Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, (ed. E. Sachau *et alii*), Leiden 1904, 3(1), p. 87; 4(1), pp. 73, 143; and see Ibn Kathīr, (above n.85), *ult. loc. cit.*
116. Agapius of Manbij, *Kitāb al-ʿUnwān* (*Histoire universelle*), 2, (ed. & Trans. A. Vasiliev, *Patrologia Orientalis*, VIII, 1912 [reprint, 1971] p. 193.
117. On him and his sources see Rosenthal (above n.48), pp. 137 f.; Palmer and Brock (above n.105), p. 96 f. R. Hoyland, "Arabic, Syriac and Greek historiography in the first ʿAbbāsid century: an inquiry into intercultural traffic," *Aram*, 3, 1991, pp. 217–239.
118. Caetani (above n.94), pp. 66–67.
119. Palmer and Brock (above n.105), p. 148 in an extract from the reconstructed chronicle by Dionysius.
120. Abū Ismāʿīl Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Azdī, *Kitāb Futūḥ ash-Shām*, (ed. Lees), Calcutta, 1854, p. 81.
121. Nuwayrī (above n.85), 19, pp. 120–121.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
123. Ibn Kathīr (above n.85), p. 69.
124. Ṭabarī (above n.54), 1, p. 2125 (and see next note).
125. *Ibid.*, pp. 2395–2396; Balādhurī (above n.1) p. 162.
126. See summing up by Donner (above n.62), pp. 113 ff. Many parallels and contradicting traditions about the identity of the commander, see Balādhurī (above n.1), pp. 149 ff.; Ibn ʿAsākir (above n.60), pp. 73, 480; Ibn Saʿd (above n.115), pp. 73, 143.
127. Khalīfah b. Khayyāṭ al-ʿAṣfūrī, *Taʿrīkh*, Beirut 1993, p. 79.
128. Such population numbers as found in the sources or calculated by some method or the other before the introduction of modern censuses, are of no value whatsoever, although some scholars tend to take such numbers seriously. See D. Ayalon, "Regarding population estimates in the countries of Medieval Islam," *JESHO*, 28 (1985), pp. 1–19.
129. Balādhurī (above n.1), p. 135.
130. See Ibn Khaldūn (above n.15).
131. Balādhurī (above n.1), pp. 135–136.
132. Khalīfah (above n.127), p. 80.
133. For example, see Balādhurī *ibid.*; Khalīfah, *ibid.*
134. Balādhurī, *ibid.*; Khalīfah, *ibid.*; adh-Dhahabī, (above n.85), 1, p. 376.
135. Ṭabarī (above n.54), p. 2349; Khalīfah (above n.127), p. 89.
136. Khalīfah, *ibid.*
137. Ṭabarī (above n.54), p. 2101.
138. Yūsuf b. ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istiʿāb fī Maʿrifat al-Aṣḥāb*, 1, Beirut 1992, p. 64.
139. Balādhurī (above n.1), p. 136.
140. Ṭabarī (above n.54), p. 2158.
141. Ibn Saʿd (above n.115), 5, 1905, p. 329; 2, 1918, p. 126; Balādhurī (above n.1), p. 134.
142. Ṭabarī, (above n.54), p. 2100; Khalīfah (above n.127), p. 89.
143. See Rosenthal's emphatic words (above n.48) pp. 20–21.
144. Qurʾān 12:3.
145. Ibn Kathīr (above n.85), 5, p. 69.

146. Ṭabarī (above n.54), pp. 2398–2400; Ibn Kathīr, *ibid.*, p. 125.
147. Babylonian Talmud, *Yomah* 11a.
148. See M. Jastrow, *Dictionary of Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, Midrashic Literature, and Targumim*, New York 1950, p. 118; Gil (above n.101), p. 34.
149. See Adin Steinsalz's commentary on *Yomah* 11a (above n.147) in his edition of the Babylonian Talmud.
150. Ibn Khaldūn (above.n.85), p. 900; Ibn Kathīr (above n.85), 5, pp. 77 ff.
151. According to Ṭabarī's version (above n.54), pp. 2097–2099; Nuwayrī (above n.85). The Arabic name could well be a mispronunciation of Georgius son of Theodorus (Theodore).
152. Ṭabarī (above n.54), pp. 2087–2088.
153. Gil (above n.101), p. 34.
154. Ṭabarī (above n.54), p. 2125.
155. Khalīfah (above n.127), p. 80.
156. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
157. Ibn Kathīr (above n.86), 5, p. 69.
158. "Then their prophet said to them..." Qur'ān, 2:247–248. (Trans. Arberry)
159. *Ibid.*, 12:10.
160. *Ibid.*, 12:21.
161. *Ibid.*, 2:249–251.
162. *Ibid.*, 28:76.
163. *Ibid.*, 2:102.
164. There is much sense in what Crone wrote in this vein, see P. Crone, *Meccan trade and the rise of Islam*, Princeton 1987, pp. 215, 219, 232; J. M. B. Jones, "Ibn Isḥāq and al-Wāqidī: The dream of al-ʿĀtika and the raid of Nakhla in relation to the charge of plagiarism," *BSOAS*, 22 (1959), p. 46.
165. Qur'ān, 8:31.
166. *Ibid.*, 25:5; and in this and similar tone always emphasizing the "stories of the ancients:" *ibid.*, 6:25; 16:24, 83; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; 83:13.
167. A. Noth, "Der Charakter der ersten grossen Sammlungen von Nachrichten zur frühen Kalifenzeit," *Der Islam*, 47(1971), p. 169; Crone (above n.164), p. 216.
168. On this issue see N. Abbot, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, II, Chicago 1967, pp. 7, 39.
169. Ṭabarī (above n. 54), p. 2126.
170. Crone (above n.164), p. 225; and compare concerning Africa, J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition on History*, Madison, Wisconsin 1985, pp. 148–150.
171. Brock (above n.11) p. 9.