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Source: *Byzantion*, 1981, Vol. 51, No. 2 (1981), pp. 579-591

Published by: Peeters Publishers

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/44170709>

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## THE MONOPHYSITE RESPONSE TO THE ARAB INVASIONS

Some two centuries ago Edward Gibbon wrote :

I have already explained the origin and progress of the Monophysite controversy, and the persecution of emperors which converted a sect into a nation and alienated Egypt from their religion and government. The Saracens were received as the deliverers of the Jacobite church <sup>(1)</sup>.

It is a position which remains orthodox, and indeed has been extended to encompass the Syrian Monophysites. So, for example, Ostrogorsky :

... irreconcilable religious differences had raised up a wall of hatred between Constantinople and her eastern provinces, the separatist tendencies of the Syrians and Copts had been strengthened, and their willingness to defend the empire finally undermined <sup>(2)</sup>.

Modern scholars generally accept that during the Arab invasions of Syria, Palestine and Egypt in the 630s and 640s the native peoples supported, or at least failed to oppose, the attackers, and that this was because imperial persecution of Monophysitism had occasioned great animosity between these peoples and their Byzantine overlords <sup>(3)</sup>. Many follow Gibbon further in making a connection between "sect" and "nation". They assert that the flourishing of Mono-

(1) Edward GIBBON, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury, London, 1898, vol. 5, p. 448.

(2) George OSTROGORSKY, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. Joan Hussey, Oxford, 1968, p. 110 ; cf. p. 60.

(3) See among others R. THOUMIN, *Histoire de Syrie*, Lille, 1929, p. 160 ; A. R. LEWIS, *Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean AD 500-1100*, Princeton, 1951, p. 54 ; B. SPULER, *Geschichte der Islamischen Lander*, 1 *Der Chalifenzeit* (= *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Bd. 6), Leiden, 1952, p. 25 ; D. and J. SOURDEL, *La civilisation de l'Islam classique*, Paris, 1968, p. 43 (where taxation is also mentioned).

physitism in the eastern provinces was linked with national feeling, either stimulating or being stimulated by such feeling. Hence the Syrians and Copts, being aware of their own identities as peoples and so, defining themselves against the Byzantines, were prepared to co-operate with the invaders in the interest of throwing off the hated Byzantine yoke<sup>(4)</sup>. In the pages which follow I shall suggest that, however attractive this device may be to explain the rapidity of the Arab conquests, it should be rejected.

Firstly, the assumption that the eastern provinces were monolithic in their Monophysitism needs to be questioned<sup>(5)</sup>. To be sure,

(4) Gaston WEIT, *L'Égypte musulmane de la conquête arabe à la conquête ottomane*, Cairo, 1932 (= Muhammad ZAKI, ed., *Précis de l'histoire d'Égypte*, vol. 2), pp. 113-17; Philip K. HITTI, *History of the Arabs*, 5th ed. London, 1951, p. 153; André COCATRE-ZILGIEN, "Amr-ibn-al-Ass et la conquête de l'Égypte par les Arabes", in *Annales Africaines*, 1959, pp. 201-44 (the "hostilité raciale" of the Copts for the Byzantines, p. 210; the Copts constituted "une sorte d'Église nationale", p. 217); Daniel J. SAHAS, *John of Damascus on Islam the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"*, Leiden, 1972, p. 23, n. 2; A. N. STRATOS, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, vol. 3, Amsterdam, 1972, pp. 127-28, cf. pp. 92 ("the hatred of the indigenous populace for Byzantium"), 118, 302. Taken to extremes this view discounts the role of the Arabs in their own conquests, which become "the political outcome" of the Christological controversies: Hélène AHRWEILER, "The geography of the iconoclastic world", in Anthony BRYER and Judith HERRIN (ed.), *Iconoclasm*, Birmingham, 1977, pp. 21-27 at p. 26.

In the case of Egypt the adoption of Monophysitism has been explicitly linked with nationalism: E. R. HARDY, "The patriarchate of Alexandria: a study in national Christianity", in *Church History*, 15, 1946, pp. 81-100; IDEM, *Christian Egypt: Church and People*, New York, 1952; and the more nuanced treatment of Ramsay MACMULLEN, "Nationalism in Roman Egypt", in *Aegyptus*, 44, 1964, pp. 179-99. The Copt's "antiimperiale Grundhaltung", independent of religion, is stressed by Heinrich L. NICKEI., *Die Koptische Kunst im Rahmen der Byzantinischen Abhängigkeit und Eigenständigkeit*, in J. IRMSCHER (ed.), *Koptologische Studien in der DDR*, Halle-Wittenberg, 1965, pp. 134-46, at p. 143.

If the present study has any antecedents they are to be found in Louis DUCHESNE, *L'Église au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1925, pp. 426-27; A. H. M. JONES, *Were the ancient heresies national or social movements in disguise?*, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 10, 1959, pp. 280-98; and more generally Miriam LICHTHEIM, *Autonomy versus unity in the Christian East*, in Lynn WHITE jnr. (ed.), *The Transformation of the Roman World Gibbon's Problem after Two Centuries*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966, pp. 119-46.

(5) See in general W. H. C. FRENCH, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, Cambridge, 1972.

Egypt was strongly for the Monophysite cause, yet the letters of Pope Gregory the Great to Eulogius, the Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria, indicate that the orthodox Christians were making gains<sup>(6)</sup>. The patriarchate of the Chalcedonian John the Almoner (611-19) seems to have been a period of advance for the orthodox, for his biographer states that he was able to increase the number of churches where the orthodox liturgy was maintained from seven to 70<sup>(7)</sup>, and we are also told that during his patriarchate a pair of debaters, John and Sophronius, “delivered many villages, very many churches, and many monasteries too”<sup>(8)</sup>. Nor did the Chalcedonians wither after the Arab conquest. During the patriarchate of John III (677-86) “the people of Agharwah and the people of the Xoite nome”, formerly Chalcedonians, became Monophysites<sup>(9)</sup>. It could be argued on the strength of his biography that there was a substantial Chalcedonian population as late as the time of John’s successor, the Coptic patriarch Isaac (686-89), for it is possible that George, his rival for the patriarchal see, was a Chalcedonian<sup>(10)</sup>, while the many heretics Isaac converted to the “orthodox faith” may have included Chalcedonians<sup>(11)</sup>. Palestine, occasionally overlooked in discussions of this problem, remained overwhelmingly orthodox. Traditionally it had been impervious to Egyptian influence, and Monophysite ideas radiating from the north in the sixth century appear to have made little

(6) *Gregorii I. Registrum* ed. P. Ewald and L. M. Hartmann, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistulae*, 1, VIII, 29 (“sanctitatis vestrae scripta ... de conversione hereticorum”), XIII, 44 (Eulogius “tam multos hereticos ad fidem catholicam revocat”), XIII, 45 (“et imminutos ore vestro hostes ecclesiae et multiplicatos greges dominicos agnovi”); cf. XII, 16 on the possible taking over by Chalcedonians of a Monophysite monastery. These letters all fall within the period 598-602.

(7) *Life of John the Almsgiver*, in *Three Byzantine saints*, ed. and trans. E. DAWES and N. BAINES, Oxford, 1948, ch. 5, p. 201.

(8) *Ibid.*, supp. ch. 32, pp. 242-43.

(9) Severus OF ASMOUNEIN, *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, ed. and trans. B. EVETTS, *P[atrolologia] O[rientalis]*, 5, pp. 18-19.

(10) *Histoire du Patriarche copte Isaac*, ed. and trans. E. AMÉLINEAU, Paris, 1890, pp. 44-49 + p. xxvii.

(11) *Ibid.*, p. 52; see too the puzzling reference to a “pseudobishop”, p. 64. Amélineau’s note 2 is not helpful.

headway<sup>(12)</sup>. Syria is poorly documented ; nevertheless one of the homelies of Antiochus Monachus would seem to indicate orthodox strength in Antioch early in the seventh century<sup>(13)</sup>.

But let us grant that the majority of citizens in the eastern provinces were Monophysite. This does not necessarily mean that they were hostile to imperial policy. During the Persian wars Heraclius came to accept the formula "one operation" (*μία ἐνέργεια*) as accurately describing Christ<sup>(14)</sup>. It was an attempt to find ground which Chalcedonians and Monophysites could share, and as a piece of imperial statesmanship stands in the line of Zeno's *Henotikon* and Justinian's flirtation with Theopaschism, and subsequent condemnation of the Three Chapters. Its reception in the East is instructive. In Egypt, all the moderate Monophysite clergy ("Theodosians"), men distinguished in the civil offices and the army, and thousands of common people, entered into communion with the Chalcedonian patriarch Cyrus on the basis of common acceptance of "one operation". Cyrus excitedly wrote to Sergius, the patriarch of Constantinople :

There was rejoicing at the peace of the holy churches in all the Christ-loving city of the Alexandrians and its surroundings as far as the clouds, and beyond these among the heavenly orders<sup>(15)</sup>.

(12) Cf. the reflections of Derwas J. CHITTY, *The Desert a City*, Oxford, 1966, p. 144. Even during their period of splendour when Severus was patriarch of Antioch (512-518), there were only two Monophysite bishops south of Damascus (cf. E. HONIGMANN, *Évêques et évêchés monophysites d'Asie antérieurs au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Louvain, 1951 (= *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, Subsidia 2), map 2).

(13) Antiochus MONACHUS, *Homilia*, CXXX, *De regno caelorum P[atrolologia] G[raeca]*, 100, col. 1844. See too Georges TCHALENKO, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du nord*, vol. 3, Paris, 1958 (= *Institut français d'archéologie de Beyrouth, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique*, vol. 50) appendice III, *Couvents antiques*, I. Les couvents du Massif Calcaire dans quatre lettres monophysites du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle (par André CAQUOT), pp. 63-85. Unfortunately the surviving sources, while allowing scholars to determine the balance of Chalcedonians and Monophysites at stages of the sixth century, do not permit us to do the same for the period of the Arab invasion ; cf. HONIGMANN, *op. cit.* and Robert DEVRESSE, *Le Patriarchat d'Antioche depuis la paix de l'Église jusqu'à la conquête arabe*, Paris, 1945.

(14) Short discussion in H.-G. BECK, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im Byzantinischen Reich*, Munich, 1959, pp. 292-95, 430-33.

(15) J. D. MANSI, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Amplissima Collectio*, 11, col. 561-64 ;

One is tempted to discount such an enthusiastic report, but the Monophysite biographer of the Coptic patriarch Benjamin admits that "a countless number" of Monophysites became reconciled with those who adhered to the Council of Chalcedon, and names the bishops Cyrus of Nikiu and Victor of the Faiyūm<sup>(16)</sup>. Of course many Monophysites remained outside the union, chief among them the Patriarch Benjamin, but considerable progress had been made.

The same was true in Syria. Heraclius approached the Monophysite patriarch Athanasius of Antioch, who responded with a long better explaining why the Council of Chalcedon was not acceptable<sup>(17)</sup>. A meeting, lasting twelve days, was subsequently held at Mabboug between Heraclius, Athanasius and twelve bishops. The lengthy discussions failed and Heraclius resorted to persecution, but many monks came to accept the Council of Chalcedon, and Michael the Syrian mentions three important monasteries in this regard<sup>(18)</sup>.

Heraclius' proposal, then, made headway among the Monophysite communities of both Egypt and Syria. The strongest opposition came from the other side, being led by the strongly Chalcedonian Sophronius (monk and Patriarch of Jerusalem, probably to be identified with the Sophronius who had earlier preached in Egypt on behalf of Chalcedon, above p. 581) and Maximus the Confessor<sup>(19)</sup>. In short the very people who, according to the theory

the formula of union follows immediately. There is a helpful discussion in C. J. HEFELE and H. LECLERCQ, *Histoire des conciles*, 3, 1, Paris, 1909, pp. 339-42. See too THEOPHANES, *Chronographia* (ed. Ch. de Boor, Leipzig, 1883) *anno mundi* 6121, who quotes moderate Monophysites as saying it was not so much a case of their entering into communion with Chalcedon, as Chalcedon entering into communion with them.

(16) SEVERUS, *History ...*, P.O., 1, p. 491.

(17) Michel LE SYRIEN, *Chronique*, ed. and trans. J.-B. CHABOT, Paris, 1899-1924, vol. 2, pp. 405-8.

(18) *Ibid.*, p. 412.

(19) Consult BECK, *Kirche und theologische Literatur* on Sophronius and Maximus, pp. 434 ff. Sophronius' career is discussed by H. CHADWICK, "John Moschus and his friend Sophronius the Sophist", in *Journal of Theological Studies*, n. 8, 25, 1974, pp. 41-74. The ardour of these apologists can be contrasted with the response of Pope Honorius to Monoenergism: Georg KREUZER, *Die Honoriusfrage im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit*, Stuttgart, 1975.

outlined at the beginning of this paper, one would have expected to be in step with the dictates of Constantinople, were those who most vehemently objected to imperial policy.

From this I conclude that the Monophysites, even in matters of theology, were not of their nature anti-Roman. That this was so is further indicated by the treatment of Roman history by Monophysite authors writing after the Arab conquest, when they were free to write as they pleased of their former masters. The Syriac *Chronicon anonymum ad annum 724 pertinens*, for example, offers a reasonably detailed coverage of Roman history from Caesar to the Council of Chalcedon, in which I can detect no hostility to Rome *per se*. The author's view is nuanced; bad emperors are criticized, but praise is heaped on the good. Such a one was Constantine who "gave his heart to God, and God magnified him and exalted him above the kingdoms, and delivered his enemies into his hands" (20). Similarly, the Egyptian writer John of Nikiu describes Constantine as "the beloved of God, glorious and resplendent in righteousness ... he became great before God who liveth forever" (21). Emperors subsequent to Chalcedon are judged with reference to their doctrine, and so Monophysite authors tend to reverse the judgements of Chalcedonian writers: John of Nikiu states that "after the blessed God-loving orthodox emperor Anastasius went to his rest, Justin the terrible, the consort of the empress Euphemia, ascended the throne" (22). Sometimes this reversal reaches truly surprising proportions, as when we read in the twelfth century account of Michael the Syrian that the empress Theodora was the daughter of a priest who lived in piety and chastity until her marriage to Justinian (23).

It would seem, therefore, that the Monophysites were by no means unvaryingly hostile to the Byzantines. It is true that some later authors make apparently blanket condemnations of the

(20) *Chronicon miscellaneum ad annum Domini 724 pertinens*, trans. J.-B. CHABOT, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium Scriptores Syri*, 4, p. 102; cf. the discussion of Theodosius I, pp. 105-6.

(21) *The Chronicle of John bishop of Nikiu*, trans. R. H. CHARLES, London, 1916, 77, 42-43; the encomium continues till 77, 104.

(22) *Ibid.*, 90, 1.

(23) Michel LE SYRIEN, *Chronique*, vol. 2, pp. 419-20.



Byzantines in connection with the Arab victories, but these condemnations merely reflect hostility to what was remembered of Heraclius' persecution immediately prior to the conquest, seen in the light of the relative liberty the Monophysites enjoyed under Islam. An example is afforded by a famous passage in Michael the Syrian :

The God of vengeance ... raised up from the south the children of Ishmael to deliver us from the hands of the Romans ... It was no light benefit for us to be freed from the cruelty of the Romans, their wickedness, anger and ardent cruelty towards us, and to find ourselves in peace <sup>(24)</sup>.

Seen in context these words merely refer to specific hardships undergone by some Monophysites shortly before the Arab invasion. It was unfortunate for the subsequent reputation of the Byzantines in the east that such judgements were, so to speak, snap-frozen at that time.

Yet the liberty offered by the Muslims provided the setting for the long decline of Coptic and Syriac culture. Hand in hand with this decline went the slow decay of Monophysite Christianity <sup>(25)</sup>. It is hard to point to a single original Monophysite thinker after the Arab conquest, and despite what many have seemed a promising beginning under Islam the Monophysite churches went steadily downhill <sup>(26)</sup>. This raises problems for those who hold that these churches in some way encapsulated national awareness. If this were so one would have expected them to show more life, if only by way of reaction against the alien Arabs. The contrast with Persia is

(24) *Ibid.*, pp. 412-12.

(25) See in general Bertold SPULER, "Die west-syrische (monophysitische) Kirche unter dem Islam", *Saeculum*, 9, 1958, pp. 322-44 ; *IDEM*, *Die Morgenländischen Kirchen*, Leiden, 1964 ; A. A. ATIYA, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, London, 1968. Pierre DU BOURGUET, *L'art Copte pendant les cinq premiers siècles de l'hégire*, in *Christentum am Nil*, ed. Klaus Wessel, Recklinghausen, 1964, argues for a survival of Coptic art as late as the eleventh or twelfth centuries, but the survival would seem to have been mainly one of technical principles. See too Ernest J. GRUBE, *Studies in the survival and continuity of pre-Muslim traditions in Egyptian Islamic Art*, in *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 1, 1962, pp. 75-93. The decline in Syriac literature is indicated by R. DUVAL, *La littérature syriaque*, 3rd ed., Paris, 1907.

(26) FRENCH, *Monophysite Movement*, pp. 357-59.



interesting, for there the Nestorian church seems to have flourished during the early centuries of Muslim overlordship. According to an inscription discovered at Si-ngan-fu in China, the Persian missionary bishop Alopen (= Abraham ?) met the emperor T'ai-tsung in 635, and judging by the forms of the names at the end of the inscription the Persian church was continuing to send large numbers of men to China two and a half centuries later<sup>(27)</sup>. As late as the eleventh century the Keraith people of central Asia were converted to Nestorian Christianity<sup>(28)</sup>. Doubtless the Persian Nestorians were in a better position than the Monophysite churches to engage in missionary activity by simple reason of geography ; nevertheless the contrast with the apparently moribund churches of Syria and Egypt is clear. Even in its secular life Persia preserved such aspects of its pre-Arabic culture as its language and art far more successfully than Syria or Egypt, and indeed the strength of its surviving traditions was such as to exercise an important role in the development of Arabic civilization<sup>(29)</sup>, which would seem to indicate that the historian seeking evidence for national culture and identity in the conquered Monophysite areas is searching in the wrong place.

Finally, before turning to the Arab wars of conquest themselves, a few words are necessary on the Byzantine attitude to the former eastern provinces after they had been lost. Writing in the early ninth century Theophanes, our chief Byzantine authority, told the story of the conquests as simply a case of Saracens winning a series of victories in the field of battle<sup>(30)</sup>. Presumably if the provincials had engaged in treachery the Byzantines would have noted this, if only to explain away the embarrassing speed and scale of their losses, but there is no indication that they were aware of any treachery or even

(27) L. E. BROWNE, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia*, Cambridge, 1933, pp. 93-108 ; Yoshiro SAEKI, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 2nd ed., Tokyo, 1951.

(28) Gregory BARHEBRAEUS, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, ed. and trans. J. B. ABBELOOS and T. J. LAMY, Louvain and Paris, 1873-77, translation col. 280.

(29) Hence the ambiguity of the phrase "the Persian conquest of Islam", used as the title of the last chapter in Richard N. FRYE, *The Heritage of Persia*, Cleveland and New York, 1963.

(30) *Chronographia annis mundi*, 6126, 6127, 6129, 6130.

disappointingly lukewarm support on the part of discontented elements. After the Monophysite provinces were lost the Byzantines by no means regarded them as gone for ever, for not only did they engage in military activities designed to bring about their reconquest but they tried to keep the doors of ecclesiastical reconciliation open as late as 680. It was only then that the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III) condemned the teachings of one operation and one will in Christ, which had been designed to bring the Monophysites back into communion with the followers of Chalcedon<sup>(31)</sup>. The tardiness of this condemnation had implications concerning the Byzantine perception of loss which we need not go into here ; but given the problems the failure to condemn these formulations caused Constantinople in its dealings with Rome, and the speed with which emperors could move in this area (evidenced by Justin's prompt settlement of the Acacian schism), the slowness to act would point to a lingering Byzantine desire for reconciliation, something which known nationalistic animosity on the part of the provincials would presumably have excluded.

Let us conclude by examining the wars of conquest themselves. Unfortunately we are badly informed on the conquest of Syria. Greek and Syriac authors are laconic, while the works of Arabic authors are late, and it is difficult to know how to interpret the information they provide. For example, the ninth century author al-Balādhuri tells a famous story of the capture of Damascus. He states that when the city was besieged the bishop offered the Arab general Khālid gifts and homage, and apparently came to an agreement with him over a covenant<sup>(32)</sup>. During the second siege the bishop prevailed on Khālid to make terms for the city, and with the aid of information passed on by "a friend of the bishop" the Arabs entered the city<sup>(33)</sup>. Could it be shown that the bishop was Monophysite or Chalcedonian the story would be useful evidence respectively for or

(31) Erich CASPAR, *Geschichte des Papsttums*, vol. 2, Tübingen, 1933, pp. 587-619 ; Johannes HALLER, *Das Papsttum Idee und Wirklichkeit*, vol. 1, 1950, pp. 333-35. Continuing Byzantine interest in the lost provinces is also indicated by the care with which Theophanes noted the occurrences of natural disasters : *Chronographia annis mundi*, 6164, 6168, 6176.

(32) al-BALĀDHURI, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, trans. P. K. HITT, New York, 1916, p. 172.

(33) *Ibid.*, p. 187.

against the religious-national hypothesis, but modern scholarship speaks with a divided voice on his allegiance<sup>(34)</sup>, and there seems to be no way of definitely establishing it. In any case, al-Balādhuri's near contemporary al-Tabari tells a different story of the taking of Damascus. According to him, it occurred because the Muslims were told of a party being held to celebrate the birth of a son to the Byzantine general in command of the city<sup>(35)</sup>. Here there is no mention of a bishop. Of course it would be possible to reconcile the two accounts, but this would not seem likely to be profitable : when authors writing at such a remove from the events stress different elements in a story to this extent, one can only wonder whether either of them is reliable.

A story told by a Syriac source is equally difficult to evaluate. We are told that in Byzantine Mesopotamia the Arabs killed Monophysite monks<sup>(36)</sup>. This would seem to tell against the religious-national thesis, but would a band of Arab troops have necessarily known the differences between Monophysite and Chalcedonian monks ? Could one safely draw any conclusion from one act by one part of a notoriously unco-ordinated army ? And in any case, Mesopotamia is not Syria. In short, the sketchy nature of the evidence does not allow us to test this thesis for Syria or Palestine<sup>(37)</sup>.

The position with regard to Egypt is totally different, as we have an excellent early source, the *Chronicle* of the Coptic bishop John of Nikiu, which was written towards the end of the seventh century. Nowhere does John indicate that the Monophysite Copts supported the invaders. Indeed, he refers to *all* the inhabitants of Egypt fleeing in panic to Alexandria, leaving behind all their goods, wealth and cattle<sup>(38)</sup>. John is explicit as to the misbehaviour of the Arabs<sup>(39)</sup>,

(34) That he was Monophysite : Alain DUCÉLLIER, *Le miroir de l'Islam : Musulmans et Chrétiens d'orient au moyen âge (VII<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Paris, 1971, p. 48. That he was Chalcedonian : SAHAS, *John of Damascus* (cit. n. 1), pp. 17-19.

(35) AL-TABARI, *Chronique de Tabari*, trans. Hermann ZOTENBERG, vol. 3, Paris, 1871, p. 363.

(36) *Chronicon miscellaneum* ... (cit. n. 21), p. 114.

(37) A story told by al-Balādhuri (*Origins* ..., p. 230) of a monk capitulating on behalf of the people at Cyrrhus is similarly difficult to evaluate.

(38) *Chronicle*, 113, 6 ; cf. 120, 28 ("the Egyptians who, through fear of the Moslem, had fled and taken refuge in the city of Alexandria").

(39) *Ibid.*, 113, 4, 118, 10.

and the fear they inspired in the native people remains a theme until the end of his work<sup>(40)</sup>. On some occasions the Copts seem to have been more inclined to resist than were the Byzantine officials : at Antioch the prefect John refused the request of the people to concert measures to attack the Arabs<sup>(41)</sup>, while the people in Alexandria tried to stone the Byzantine commander Cyrus when they learned that he had made peace with the Arabs<sup>(42)</sup>. John mentions two Coptic defectors to the Arabs only to record their speedy return to the Byzantine side<sup>(43)</sup>. His narrative never suggests that the Arabs were aware of any distinction between the Copts and other Christians ; they merely warred "against the Christians"<sup>(44)</sup>, and when some of the people of lower Egypt wished to join the Arabs "the Moslem distrusted them"<sup>(45)</sup>. After the conquest many "false Christians" became Muslim, but unfortunately for the thesis which argues that the Monophysites accepted the Arabs the only one named by John is a Chalcedonian monk<sup>(46)</sup>. In short, John gives no grounds for asserting that the Copts welcomed the Arabs, and his silence is all the more striking in that he himself was a Copt.

The *locus classicus* for the religious-national thesis applied to Egypt is John's statement that "people began to help the Moslem"<sup>(47)</sup>. However, when this phrase is taken in context it becomes clear that the help rendered was forced, not voluntary<sup>(48)</sup>, and the use of other sources in support of the notion that the Copts helped the Arabs is not convincing. The Arab historian Makrizi

(40) *Ibid.*, 120, 29-31.

(41) *Ibid.*, 115, 10.

(42) *Ibid.*, 120, 26 ; Cyrus' secrecy is significant.

(43) *Ibid.*, 114, 6-7, 114, 9-11.

(44) *Ibid.*, 115, 1.

(45) *Ibid.*, 119, 1-2.

(46) *Ibid.*, 121, 11. I would not, however, place much weight on this, as John, a staunch Monophysite, may have included this one case as reflecting badly on the Chalcedonians.

(47) *Ibid.*, 113, 2.

(48) A. J. BUTLER, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt*, Oxford, 1902, p. 236 made this quite clear, but modern scholars not only continue to assert that the Copts began to help the Arabs, but also state that they fought on their side : Ralf-Johannes LILIE, *Die byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber*, Munich, 1976 (= *Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia*, vol. 22), p. 49.

states that the Arabs approached Alexandria accompanied by a crowd of Copts who prepared the way for them, and that the Copts helped the Muslims in all their fights with the Greeks<sup>(49)</sup>, but Makrizi lived in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and so would seem to have no status as a primary source. Ibn 'Abd-Al-Hakam states that the Coptic bishop of Alexandria instructed the Copts to offer no resistance to the Arabs<sup>(50)</sup>. But this author lived in the ninth century, and it is therefore erroneous to describe his work as "the earliest surviving account of the conquest in Egypt"<sup>(51)</sup>. This title belongs to John of Nikiu, who makes no mention of any instruction issued by the Coptic patriarch. Neither does Severus, the chronicler of the Coptic patriarchs, in his account of Benjamin, the patriarch during the Arab conquest, although we are told that after the conquest the Arab general 'Amr asked for and obtained Benjamin's prayers<sup>(52)</sup>.

We may therefore conclude that the Arab conquests of Syria, Palestine and Egypt were not aided by the discontent of the local peoples. It would indeed have been surprising had these peoples cooperated with invaders from the desert, traditionally figures such as to inspire terror among settled peoples<sup>(53)</sup>. Neither would abandonment of the theory of Monophysite support for the Arabs entail any problem for modern historical scholarship, which has been by no means reluctant to advance other reasons for the early rise of Islam.

(49) MAKRIZI, *Description topographique et historique de l'Égypte*, trans. U. BOURIANT, vol. 2, Paris, 1900, p. 467.

(50) Cited in HITTI, *History* (cit. n. 4), p. 165. Inability to read Arabic has prevented my consulting the original text.

(51) *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

(52) SEVERUS, *History ...*, *P.O.*, 1, pp. 496-97. Note, however, that the Christian Arab author Eutychius, writing in the early tenth century, seems to imply that the Copts welcomed the Arabs: *Annales*, in *P.G.*, 111, col. 1105. A survey of opinion among Arab historians on Coptic and Syrian collaboration during the conquest would be interesting; I suspect it would show considerable development.

(53) The apparent indifference of provincials in the face of barbarian onslaughts against the declining western Roman empire has been discussed by A. H. M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire 282-602*, Oxford, 1964, pp. 1060 ff. Note Jones' comment: "The Roman empire never seems to have evoked any active patriotism from the vast majority of its citizens" (p. 1062). The same seems to have been true of the eastern Monophysites, and a lack of patriotism falls a long way short of active discontent, let alone discontent with nationalist undertones.

The exhaustion of Byzantium and Persia after their drawn-out wars, specific areas of Arab military superiority, the Arabian political situation, the religious force animating the earliest Muslims, bad economic conditions in Arabia, psychological and even racial factors have all been invoked<sup>(54)</sup>. Abandonment of the national-religious hypothesis would simply remove one possible explanation for an event for which there is no shortage of other possible explanations.

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(54) I hope to discuss elsewhere implications of the confusion evidenced in modern scholarship on this point.