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THE ICONOCLASTIC EDICT OF THE
CALIPH YAZID II, A.D. 721

A. A. VASILIEV

The Committee on Publications wishes to thank Professor Marius Canard for his kindness in editing this article. Except for minor corrections and the omission of the last section, which had no direct bearing on the subject, it appears in the form in which it was written by A. A. Vasiliev before his departure for Europe in April, 1953.

THE attitude of Islam toward representations of human beings has been the subject of numerous works of which a list may be found in K. A. C. Creswell's "The Lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam," *Ars Islamica*, XI–XII (1946) 159.¹ It was inspired by conceptions analogous to those of Judaism and doubtless influenced by them. These ideas found their expression in the hadiths, the traditions concerning the life and sayings of the prophet Muhammad the dates of which are not clearly determined.² It is a well known fact that before the appearance of the hadith as well as after it there were many representations of human beings in Islam, but they were forbidden in the mosques, the only place where the interdiction was strictly applied. It is curious to report that only during the fifth and sixth centuries did the Jews forbid images in their synagogues; this restriction did not exist previously, as is evident from the synagogue of Dura-Europos.³

Among the caliphs whose attitude regarding images conformed strictly to Moslem law, there was one, the Umayyad Yazid II, who extended the prohibition to the Christian churches of the empire.⁴

Inasmuch as there is a certain parallelism between the development of the iconoclastic ideas in Byzantium, which was relatively slow before the promulgation of the edict of Leo III in 726,⁵ and the development of the

¹ Revised version of his first essay in his *Early Muslim Architecture*, I (Oxford, 1932) 269–271. See supplement to the bibliography given by Creswell in Bishr Farès, "Essai sur l'esprit de la décoration islamique. Caire, 1952," *Conférences de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale*, III, 27. The author points out in this work that only the most rigid applied the interdiction literally, and that in the tenth century authorized scholars believed that only the representation of Allah in bodily form was strictly forbidden.

² Contrary to formerly accepted opinion, there is nothing on this subject in the Koran.

³ See J. B. Frey, "La question des images chez les Juifs à la lumière des récentes découvertes," *Biblica*, XV (Rome, 1934) 298–299. *The Excavations at Dura-Europos*. Preliminary Report of the Sixth Season of Work, October 1932–March 1933, ed. by M. Rostovtzeff, A. Bellinger, C. Hopkins and C. Welles (New Haven, 1936).

⁴ It was obviously not necessary to apply the same measures to the synagogues. Some scholars have thought that the predecessor of Yazid, 'Omar II, well known for his strict Muslim orthodoxy and his acts against the Christians, also pursued an iconoclastic policy. A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their non-Muslim Subjects* (London-Bombay, 1930). R. Aigrain, *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, III (Paris, 1924) col. 1323; J. B. Frey, *op. cit.* 299; R. de Vaux, O.P., "Une mosaïque byzantine à Ma'in [Transjordan]," *Revue biblique*, XLVII (1938) 227–258. On the basis of an inscription dated 719–720 (614, the era of Bosra), de Vaux conjectures that the mosaics of the church of Ma'in were restored in this year following the destruction carried out by the Moslem iconoclasts under the reign of 'Omar II (died February 720). He doubts the historicity of the edict of Yazid II, for he thinks that it has not been mentioned by any Arab author. See below.

⁵ But, on ascending the imperial throne in 717, Leo was not an avowed iconoclast. A remarkable molybdo-bull (seal) of Leo's reign, from this initial period, has been preserved. On one side is represented a young, clean-shaven emperor crowned with a diadem bearing a cross; on the other side, the Virgin holding on her left arm the Infant Jesus. Since the seal bears the legend "Leo and Constantine, the Faithful Emperors of the Romans," it is to be

same ideas in the Islamic world, which proceeded more rapidly because Islam was a more recent religion, and, inasmuch as, according to some scholars, the edict of Leo III may have been inspired by the edict of Yazid of 721, it is important to review the sources relative to Yazid's iconoclasm, and to study certain questions which bring out the political similarity between the Emperor and the Caliph.

GREEK SOURCES

I begin this study with a discussion of sources referring to the edict of Yazid II, and consider first the Greek texts.

The oldest, and contemporary, source that mentions the Saracen religious superstitions similar to idolatry fails to give any information on Islamic iconoclasm. This source is the letter of the Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople (715–730) to Thomas of Claudiopolis, one of the iconoclastic bishops of Asia Minor, written about 724, shortly before the opening of the iconoclastic policy of Leo III, and preserved in the acts of the Second Council of Nicaea of 787.⁶ In his letter, after accusing the Jews, who “not only just now, but often reproached us for such things” (i.e. for idolatry in the form of veneration of images), and calling them “true worshippers of idols” (οἱ τῆς ὄντως εἰδωλολατρείας θεραπευταί), Germanus says that the Saracens also seem to hit upon something similar, since “they, up to our own days, venerate in the desert an inanimate stone [λίθῳ ἀψύχῳ] which is called Khobar [Χοβάρ].”⁷

attributed to a year after 720, when Constantine V was associated to the throne. See N. Lihačev, “Sceaux de l'empereur Léon III l'Isaurien,” *Byzantion*, XI (1936) 473–474. Additional evidence of the early attitude of Leo III towards the images is to be found in his reply to a letter of the Caliph 'Omar II (hence before 720), as given by the Armenian historian Ghevond (see below, p. 43). This letter has been translated and explained with care by A. Jeffery, who considers it authentic: “Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Omar II and Leo III,” *Harvard Theological Review*, XXXVII (1944) 269–332. Leo III, answering the Caliph's question, “Why do you adore . . . pictures and the cross?” explains why the Christians honor the cross, and adds: “As for pictures, . . . finding in the Old Testament that divine command which authorized Moses to have executed in the tabernacle the figures of the Cherubim, and animated by a sincere attachment for the disciples of the Lord, who burned with love for the Saviour Himself, we have always felt a desire to conserve their images, which have come down to us from their times as their living representations. Their presence charms us, and we glorify God who has saved us through the intermediary of His only-begotten Son, who appeared in the world in a similar figure, and we glorify the saints. But as for the wood and the colors, we do not give them any reverence.” (p. 322)

⁶ Mansi, XIII, 109 B-E.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 109 D-E: Σαρράκηνοῖς δὲ ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐπισκίπτειν δοκοῦσιν, ἀρκετὸν εἰς αἰσχύνην καὶ ἐντροπὴν προσαγαγεῖν τὴν μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τελλομένην παρ' αὐτῶν λίθῳ ἀψύχῳ προσφώνησιν, τὴν τε τοῦ λεγομένου Χοβάρ ἐπὶ κλησιν, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῆς ματαίας αὐτῶν πατροπαράδοτα ἐκέισε ἀναστροφῆς ὡς ἐν ἐπισήμῳ ἑορτῇ παιγνιώδη μυστήρια.

Here is the earliest mention of the word Khobar in the sense of the Kaaba in Mekka. Later, but still in the eighth century, John of Damascus, in his *De haeresibus Liber*, refers to the Kaaba as Χαβαθώ or Khaber. As did the Patriarch Germanus, he reproaches the Saracens with adoring and kissing the stone, which is said to represent the head of Aphrodite.⁸

The λίθος ἄψυχος in the letter of Patriarch Germanus brings to mind a saying ascribed by a Moslem writer to the second Caliph 'Omar, who, referring to the black stone, supposedly declared: "I know that thou art a stone, without power to harm or to help, and had I not seen the Messenger of God kiss thee, I would not kiss thee."⁹

The letter of the Patriarch Germanus, though failing to supply any information on the iconoclastic edict of Yazid II, shows that, from his own point of view, the real idolators were the Jews and Arabs. In the person of the Patriarch we have a man strongly opposed to the iconoclastic policy of Leo III, who, refusing to sign the imperial edict of 730, was deposed, and against whom the iconoclastic council of 754 proclaimed, "Anathema to the Patriarch Germanus, the worshipper of wood." The fact that the deposition of this strong opponent of Leo's policy took place only in 730 shows that the iconoclastic policy of Leo before 730 was not too violent nor too intolerant, since during these preceding years the Emperor could tolerate as the head of the church his open adversary. Ostrogorsky, and Ladner, who follows him, assert that Leo III had tried by peaceful means to convert his subjects, before enforcing the first iconoclastic measure.¹⁰

The most important Greek source concerning the origin of iconoclasm, which connects it with the Jewish and Arabian influences, is the report of the most reverend presbyter John of Jerusalem, representative of the

⁸ *Joannis Damasceni de haeresibus Liber*. Migne, P.G., XCIV, 768 D-769 A-B: διαβάλλουσι δὲ ἡμᾶς ὡς εἰδωλολάτραι προσκυνούντας τὸν σταυρὸν, ὃν καὶ βδελύσσονται· καὶ φαμεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς· πῶς οὖν ὑμεῖς λίθῳ προστρέβετε κατὰ τὴν Χαβαθῶν ὑμῶν, καὶ φιλεῖτε τὸν λίθον ἀσπαζόμενοι; . . . οὗτος δὲ, ὃν φασι λίθον, κεφαλὴ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἐστίν, ἣν προσεκύνουν, ἣν Χαβὲρ προσηγόρευον, ἐφ' ὃν καὶ μέχρι νῦν ἐγγλυφίδος ἀποσκίασμα τοῖς ἀκριβῶς κατανοοῦσι φαίνεται. See E. Caspar, "Papst Gregor II, und der Bilderstreit," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, LII (1933) 39, n. 30. *Idem*, *Geschichte des Papsttums*, II (Tübingen, 1933) 648. Cf. K. Güterbock, *Der Islam im Lichte der byzantinischen Polemik* (Berlin, 1912) 11, and W. Eichner, "Die Nachrichten über den Islam bei den Byzantinern," *Der Islam*, XXII (1936) 234-241.

⁹ *Le Recueil des traditions mahométanes par Abou Abdallah Mohammed ibn Ismaïl el-Bokhârî*, published by M. L. Krehl, I (Leiden, 1862) 406, 1 sq. *El-Bokhârî*, Les traditions islamiques traduites de l'arabe avec notes et index par O. Houdas et W. Marçais, I (Paris, 1903) 520. Referring to this quotation, C. H. Becker remarks: "That such fetish-worship disgusted some of his own [i.e. the Prophet's] followers appears evident from a saying ascribed to the Caliph 'Omar." *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, II, 325.

¹⁰ G. Ostrogorsky, "Les débuts de la querelle des images," *Mélanges Charles Diehl*, I (Paris, 1930) 238-242. G. B. Ladner, "Origin and Significance of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *Mediaeval Studies*, II (New York-London, 1940) 135.

Anatolian bishops, who read it at the fifth session of the Second Council of Nicaea, 787.¹¹

At this session, the Patriarch Tarasius said: "It will now be right for us to hear our brother and beloved lord [Κυρός] John, legate of the Apostolic Thrones of the East; for he has with him a writing which will explain how the subversion of images began [πόθεν ἤρξατο ἡ τῶν εἰκόνων καταστροφή]." The Holy Council said: "We should like much, my lord, to hear about this."

Hereafter follows, in abridged form, the contents of John's report, which he read from his previously written paper [ἀπὸ πιπτακίου ἀνέγνω]:

"I, unworthy and humblest of all, wish to lay before this, your Holy and Sacred Council, in all truth [μετὰ πάσης ἀληθείας], how, when, and whence this most vile and God-detested heresy of the detractors of Christianity and iconoclasts had its beginning; and, being anxious to use what brevity I can, I have decided to read to you from a written document, so that no element of truth should escape me." Then, after mentioning the death of the Caliph Suleiman (σύμβουλος Σελεμάν, 715–717), and saying a few words about his successor 'Omar ('Omar II, Οὔμαρος, 717–720), John proceeded: "On 'Omar's death, Ezid [Ἐζίδος, Yazid II, 720–724], a man of frivolous and unstable turn of mind, succeeded him. There lived a certain man at Tiberias, a ringleader of the lawless [παρὰ νόμων] Jews, a magician and fortuneteller, an instrument of soul-destroying demons, whose name was Tessarakontapechys, a bitter enemy of the Church of God.¹² On learning of the frivolity

¹¹ Mansi, XIII, 196 E-200. John's report was also published separately by Combefis, in his edition of Theophanes Continuatus. See Bonn ed., 481–484. For an English translation of the *Acta* of this Council, see *The Seventh General Council, the Second of Nicaea, held A.D. 787, in which the Worship of Images was Established, with copious notes from the "Caroline Books" compiled by order of Charlemagne for its confutation*. Translated from the originals by The Rev. J. Mendham, M.A. (London, 1850); for John's report, see pp. 294–297. For the indication of this edition I am greatly indebted to Professor E. Kitzinger. In spite of some errors and misunderstandings, the translation is satisfactory. John's report is reproduced in an abridged English version by K. A. C. Creswell, "The Lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam," *Ars Islamica*, XI–XII (1946) 164. On John of Jerusalem, who was presbyter, monk, and the former *Syncellus* of the Patriarch of Antioch, see B. M. Melioransky, *George of Cyprus and John of Jerusalem, the Two Little Known Champions for Orthodoxy in the Eighth Century* (St. Petersburg, 1901) 77–102 (in Russian). According to Melioransky, the report which John read at the Council had been compiled not in 787 but much earlier, in 769 (p. 98).

¹² τεσσαρακοντάπηχυς, i.e. 40 cubits high (Mansi, XIII, 197 B). I believe that this Jewish wizard from Tiberias may be identified with an individual employed by Leo III who is mentioned in an anonymous Arabic historical work entitled *Kitāb al-Uyūn* (Book of the Wells), of the eleventh to thirteenth century (?), and nicknamed "Forty Cubits." E. W. Brooks, "The Campaign of 716–718 from Arabic Sources," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, XIX (1899) 26 and n. 2. On this Arabic source see A. Vasiliev-M. Canard, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2 (Brussels, 1950) 220–221. Since Theophanes mentions a certain Syrian freedman Beser (Βησήρ) who gained the high esteem of Leo III for his bodily strength and his concurrence in the emperor's iconoclastic policy (p. 402), we may surmise that the ringleader of the lawless Jews mentioned in the *Acta* of the Council and named *Tessarakontapechys* was this

[κουφότητα] of the ruler Yazid, this most-wicked Jew approached him and attempted [ἐπεχείρει] to utter prophecies . . . saying: ‘You will remain thirty years in this your kingship if you follow my advice.’ That foolish tyrant, yearning for a long life (for he was self indulgent and dissolute) answered: ‘Whatever you say, I am ready to do, and, if I attain my desire, I will repay you with highest honors.’ Then the Jewish magician [φαρμακομάντις] said to him: ‘Order immediately, without any delay or postponement, that an encyclical letter [ἐγκύκλιον ἐπιστολήν] be issued throughout your empire to the effect that every representational painting [πάσαν εἰκονικὴν διαζωγράφησιν], whether on tablets or in wall-mosaics, on sacred vessels or on altar coverings, and all such objects as are found in Christian churches, be destroyed and thoroughly abolished, nay also representations of all kinds [οἰαδήποτε] that adorn and embellish the market places of cities [ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς πόλεων].’ And moved by satanic wickedness, the false prophet added: ‘every likeness,’ contriving thereby to make unsuspected [ἀνυπόρατον] his hostility against us.¹³

Beser, although the latter was not a Jew. This name in the abridged form *Sarantapechys* occurs twice in the latter part of Theophanes’ Chronicle. See Joshua Starr, “An Iconodulic Legend and Its Historical Basis,” *Speculum*, VIII (1933) 500–503. Starr gives two other instances of this name, and, below, I shall produce additional instances.

¹³ In the Latin version of this text in Mansi we read: *falsus divinus addidit, omnem similitudinem: argumentatus hoc, ut importabilem ostenderet inimicitiam quam contra nos habebat*. But the word ἀνυπόρατον does not mean *importabilis*. It seems that translators took ἀνυπόρατον for something like ἀφόρητον, meaning *unendurable, irresistible*. As we know, John’s report was also printed by Combefis in the volume of his edition of *Theophanes Continuatus* (Bonn, 481–484), where the text of this passage is identical to that of Mansi; but instead of one word ἀνυπόρατον, Combefis’ text gives two words ἀν ὑπόρατον. The Latin version runs as follows: *falsus vates adjecit quicquid demum simulacrorum suspectum exosumque exstaret, suum in nos odium studens declarare*. I think that the correct interpretation of this passage may be found in the Third *Antirrheticus* of the Patriarch Nicephorus, who refers directly to the text of John’s report. Here is the text: διαβολικὸν δὲ τοῦ θεομάχου τὸ κακούργημα, τὸν δόλον ἐγκρύψαντος, ὡς δὴ καὶ λανθανόντως διὰ τοῦ πᾶν ὁμοίωμα καθαιρεῖσθαι, συγκαταβληθῆναι καὶ τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἱερογραφίας τὴν εὐκοσμίαν. I.e.: “Diabolical was the wickedness of the enemy of God who concealed his cunning so that indirectly [λανθανόντως], along with the destruction of every likeness, the beauty of our sacred paintings should also be thrown down” (Migne, *P.G.*, C, 529). In the Latin version of this text, the Greek adverb λανθανόντως is translated *tacito artificio*. Mendham translates this passage as follows: “the false prophet with satanic cunning added this ‘every image,’ contriving thereby to display his hatred against us *without being suspected*” (*op. cit.*, 296). Hefele, after producing the statement “thou shouldst destroy also all the profane images which serve to the ornamentation of the cities,” writes: “The Jew had added this last point in order that one might not suspect him of speaking in such a way because of hatred of the Christians.” C. Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte*, III, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1877) 374; French translation by Dom H. Leclercq, *Histoire des Conciles*, II, 2 (Paris, 1910) 630. According to the two writers just quoted, particularly Hefele, the Jew who had suggested the destruction of images and “any likeness” was very sensitive to the opinion of the Christians about him; he wanted to show that he was opposed not only to the icons which might still have been dear to many Christians, but to the representations of living beings

“The wretched tyrant, yielding most readily to this advice, sent [officials] and destroyed the holy icons and all other representations in every province under his rule, and, because of the Jewish magician, thus ruthlessly robbed the churches of God under his sway of all ornaments, before the evil came into this land [*πρὸ τοῦ φθάσαι ἐν τῇ γῆ ταύτῃ τὸ κακόν*]. As the God-loving Christians fled, lest they should have to overthrow the holy images with their own hands, the emirs who were sent for this purpose pressed into service abominable Jews and wretched Arabs; and thus they burned the venerable icons, and either smeared or scraped the ecclesiastical buildings.

“On hearing this, the pseudo-bishop of Nacolia and his followers imitated the lawless Jews and impious Arabs, outraging the churches of God. . . . When, after doing this, the Caliph [*σύμβουλος*] Ezid died, no more than two and a half years later, and went into the everlasting fire, the images were restored to their original position and honor. His son Walid [*Οὔλιδος*],¹⁴ filled with indignation, ordered the magician to be ignominiously put to death for his father’s murder, as just punishment for his false prophecy.” Such was the report of the presbyter John, representative of the Anatolian bishops.

Another very important statement about the iconoclastic activity of Yazid II was given by the bishop of Messana (*Μεσσήνη*), who was present at the same Council of Nicaea. He said: “I was a boy in Syria when the Caliph of the Saracens was destroying the icons.”¹⁵

Theophanes, who wrote his Chronicle at the beginning of the ninth century, relates that Yazid issued his iconoclastic edict under the influence of a Jewish magician from Laodicea, who had promised him a reign of forty years if he destroyed the holy icons in all the Christian churches of his empire. Yazid decided to do so, but he died in the same year, so that the majority of the population was not even aware of his decision. But the Emperor Leo was informed of this by a certain Beser (Baser) who had been born in Syria a Christian, but later had apostatized to Mohammedanism and escaped to Constantinople where, because of his physical strength and sympathetically heretical views, he won Leo’s friendship.¹⁶

in general, knowing that the latter feeling already existed in many regions of the Empire. I am greatly indebted to Professor E. Kitzinger, who called my attention particularly to the interpretation of this text and who is inclined to accept the point of view of these writers.

¹⁴ Herein the presbyter John errs: Yazid’s successor was Hisham (724–743); and then came the brief rule of the Caliph Walid III (743–744).

¹⁵ Mansi, XIII, 200: *κἀγὼ παιδίον ἤμην ἐν Συρίᾳ, ὅπηνίκα ὁ τῶν Σαβρακηνῶν σύμβουλος τὰς εἰκόνας κατέστρεφεν.*

¹⁶ Theophanes, 401–402. The Arabian historian Tabari mentions also that a certain Jew

So, from Theophanes' testimony we may come to the conclusion that Yazid issued his edict under the exclusive influence of a Jewish magician. Beser, whom I am inclined to identify with the *Tessarakontapechys* in John's report, is not a legendary figure, as Ostrogorsky supposes,¹⁷ but a real person, because Theophanes, in the latter parts of his chronicle, mentions him twice; in one instance he calls him Leo's companion, apostate, and helper in his madness, and, in the other place, he speaks of the patrician Beser (whom he qualifies as *Saracen-minded* [σαρακηνόφρονα]), who, in 741, was killed in the war of Constantine V against the usurper Artavasdus.¹⁸

The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople, in the early part of the ninth century (805–816), wrote his three *Antirrhethici* against the most violent iconoclast, the Emperor Constantine V Copronymus. In his third *Antirrheticus* he mentions a Jew from Tiberias (κατὰ τὴν Τιβεριάδα) who was a very prominent man among his compatriots, and whose surname was *Τεσσαρακοντάπηχυσ*. This same Jew took advantage of the weakness (εὐχέρεια) of the Saracen chief Yazid (Ἰέζιδος), and, in promising him a thirty-year reign, demanded that all erected images and every likeness of living beings be torn down and destroyed. Nicephorus then proceeds: "Diabolical was the wickedness of the enemy of God [τοῦ θεομάχου] who concealed his cunning so that, indirectly [λανθανόντως], along with the destruction of every likeness, our beautiful sacred paintings should also be torn down."¹⁹ When this profane edict had been issued, in addition to other images and statues, the sacred images in the churches of Christ were

predicted for Yazid forty years of reign. But he fails to mention the condition of the destruction of the icons. Tabari, ed. de Goeje, II, 1463, line 20–1464, line 1.

¹⁷ G. Ostrogorsky, "Les débuts de la querelle des images," *Mélanges Charles Diehl*, I (Paris, 1930) 236 (probablement légendaire). See L. Bréhier, Beser, *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, VIII (Paris, 1935) 1171–1172 (un personnage réel). According to Iorga, the name Βησῆρ seems to signify "vizier." N. Iorga, "Les origines de l'iconoclasme," *Bulletin de la section historique de l'Académie roumaine*, XIII (1927) 142 (1). But this is unlikely, because the Arabic word for "vizier" is *wazir*. The name Beser, or Bisir, is probably Beshir or Bishr. Cf. C. H. Becker, "Christliche Polemik und islamische Dogmenbildung," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, XXVI (1911) 192 (reprinted in *Islamstudien*, 1924).

¹⁸ Theophanes, 405; 414. See A. Lombard, *Etudes d'histoire byzantine: Constantin V, empereur des Romains* (Paris, 1902) 24. L. Bréhier erroneously says that Beser was killed in 740, i.e., before the death of Leo III; in other words, before the rebellion of Artavasdus. Beser, 1171.

¹⁹ S. Nicephori *Antirrheticus* III adv. Constantinum Copronymum, 84. Migne, *P.G.*, C, 528–532. If I am not mistaken, it has not been pointed out that the unusual surname *Tessarakontapechys* also occurs in Nicephorus' *Antirrheticus*. On Nicephorus, especially from the point of view of the manuscript tradition of his works, see a very useful article of R. P. Blake, "Note sur l'activité littéraire de Nicephore I^{er} Patriarche de Constantinople," *Byzantion*, XIV (1939) 1–15. In his *Ἱστορία σύντομος* or *Breviarium* Nicephorus does not mention Yazid's edict.

destroyed; some of them were scraped off, some were whitewashed (*κονίζοντες*), some, along with temples, vases, and vestments, were burned. This profane work was, through necessity, done by the enemies of Christ — the Jews and the Saracens — for, in spite of threats of compulsion, Christians refused to execute the order. With the carrying out of this edict, the evil of iconoclasm spread throughout the Roman Empire.²⁰

According to Nicephorus, Yazid died two years and six months after the promulgation of the edict.²¹ His son Walid (*Οὐλιδος*)²² ordered the magician executed. A little further on, Nicephorus mentions Yazid once more, not by name, but by the word “barbarian” (*βάρβαρος*). We read: “Once the root of this evil had been planted in the Roman Empire, it reached the then ruler, who was Leo [Lion] both by name and by disposition. Indulging in debauchery and wantonness like that barbarian [i.e. Yazid], he, in his fury against piety, strove to extirpate [*ἐξορύττειν*] the holy images from the churches of God” (col. 532).

In addition to Nicephorus’ three *Antirrhetici*, there is the very little known Fourth *Antirrheticus*, the first part of which was published in 1852 by Cardinal Pitra, under the title *Sancti Nicephori Antirrheticus; Liber quartus. Pars prima. Eusebii Caesariensis Confutatio*.²³ Long before Pitra’s edition, the noted author of the *Imperium Orientale*, Anselm Banduri (1670–1743), had seen this fourth *Antirrheticus*, *Adversus Eusebium sectae iconoclasticae principem*, but he failed to have it published.²⁴

In the third chapter of the *Antirrheticus IV*, we read the usual story of a Jew from Tiberias who suggested that “the king of the Arabs” (i.e. Yazid II) embark on the iconoclastic policy; but in the latter story a new, probably legendary, detail occurs; the Jew approached the Caliph at the time when he was critically ill, so that, among other promises, the Jew promised him complete restoration of health. Since this text is not easily available, I give it here in original Greek and English.²⁵ The latter reads: “[Iconoclasm] was initiated by a certain Jew by religion, a wicked man and a sorcerer, who was greatly enraged against the faith of the Christians. According to

²⁰ *διαβολικὸν δὲ τοῦ θεομάχου τὸ κακούργημα, τὸν δόλον ἐγκρύψαντος, ὡς δὴ καὶ λανθανόντως διὰ τοῦ πᾶν ὁμοίωμα καθαιρεῖσθαι, συγκαταβληθῆναι καὶ τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἱερογραφίας τὴν εὐκοσμίαν.* On this text see above.

²¹ *ὁ γὰρ Ἰέζιδος ἐκείνος, οὐ πλείονας ἢ δύο ἐνιαυτοὺς πρὸς μῆσιν ἕξ ἐπιβιοῦς, τοῦ ζῆν κακῶς ἀπορρήγνυται* (coll. 529–532).

²² Like Theophanes, Nicephorus mentions Walid, instead of Hisham, as Yazid’s successor.

²³ D. J. B. Pitra, *Specilegium Solesmense*, I (Paris, 1852) 371–503; see *Prolegomena*, p. LXXI. See Blake, *op. cit.*, 2–3.

²⁴ See Ang. Mai, *Patrum Nova Bibliotheca*, V (Roma, 1849) p. vi; reprinted from his text in Migne, *P.G.*, C, 201–202, and recently by Blake, *op. cit.*, 2.

²⁵ Pitra. *op. cit.*, 375–376.

reliable authorities, he had lived at Tiberias, where he was prominent among his compatriots. He came to the King of the Arabs, who was then critically ill, and promised that, if he destroyed all the statues and images among his subjects, he would be relieved from his illness, live happily, and prosper most signally thenceforward. These matters have been expounded at greater length in previous writings,²⁶ so it is truly demonstrated that this wicked counsel did indeed originate with the Jews and Saracens; from them, by the permission of God, was the evil hurled upon the Christians among whom it prevailed.”²⁷

Georgius Monachus is exceedingly severe toward the Jews and their part in the issue of Yazid's edict. He writes: “When Yazid [Ἰαζάρ] was the ruler of the empire of the Arabs, two God-battling Jewish youths, [who are always arrogant (τραχηλιῶντες) towards the Lord and insolent towards Christ Himself, devoted as they are to juggleries, buffooneries (φρναπτόμενοι τερατείαις και βωμολοχίαις) and diabolical divinations on the pretense of pursuing some astrological knowledge] come to the imperial court of the Arabs, and notify the above-mentioned Yazid, and reveal to him oracles of a long and happy life, on condition he is able to destroy Christian adornment [διακόσμησιν], and wipe out [ἀπαλειψαι] from the confines of the church the images of the God-Man, our Saviour Jesus Christ, and the Mother of God who had given Him birth. And this man, who was fond of life and lived like a pig [χοιρόβιος] complied with the advice of these deceivers and violently shook [διεσάλειυσεν] all the churches of the East throughout his empire. But the wretched man was deceived, for before a year had passed divine judgment befell him; and his son, who inherited the empire, determined to kill [these men] as false prophets. Then they, terrified, returned to the Isaurian border country.”²⁸

The usual story of a certain Jew from Laodicea who urged Yazid, “the then ruler of the Syrian land” (Ἰζίδ τὸν τότε τῆς Συριάτιδος γαίης κρατοῦντα) to begin destruction of the holy icons, is also told in the *Life of the Constan-*

²⁶ This statement may refer to the above quoted *Antirrheticus* III.

²⁷ Οὗτος δὴ τίκεται πρῶτον ἐκ τινος Ἰουδαίου μὲν τὴν θρησκείαν, μαροῦ δὲ καὶ γόητος, καὶ μέγα κατὰ τῆς Χριστιανῶν ἐπιλελυττηκότος πίστεως, ὃς ἔκκητο μὲν, κατὰ τινος τῶν εἰδότην, περὶ τὴν Τιβεριάδα, ἐνθα προῦχον τῶν ὁμοεθνῶν ἦν. πρὸς δὲ τὸν τῶν Ἀράβων βασιλέα, ἐσχάτη νόσῳ τηλικαῦτα βληθέντα φοιτᾶ, ὑπισχνούμενος, εἰ πᾶσαν στήλην καὶ εἰκονογραφίαν τῶν ὑπὸ χεῖρα καθέλοι, τῆς μὲν νόσου ἀπαλλαγῆσθαι, εὖ δὲ βιώσεσθαι καὶ εὐδαιμονήσειν εἰς τὰ ἔπειτα μάλα διαπρεπέστατα. ὦν πέρι ἐν φθᾶσσι πλατύτερον εἴρηται, ὥστε δεικνύσθαι ἀληθῶς ἐξ Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Σαρακηνῶν τὴν τοιαύτην ἡρτήσθαι πλάνην. ἐκ δὲ τούτων, συγχωρήσει θεοῦ, εἰς τὰ Χριστιανῶν ἐνοσκήσαν τὸ βλάβος ἐπιδημήκεν.

²⁸ Georgius Monachus (Hamartolus), ed. Muralt, 629; de Boor, II, 735–736; in Old Slavonic: V. Istrin, *The Chronicle of Georgius Hamartolus in an Old Slavonic Translation*, I (Petrograd, 1920) 467–468.

tinopolitan Martyrs, whose memory is celebrated on the ninth of August.²⁹

In the *Life of St. Stephen*, martyr under Constantine V, there is no mention of Yazid, although in the text itself, Stephen holds the Syrians, i.e. the Arabs, among other peoples – the Greeks and the Jews – responsible for the origin of iconoclasm.³⁰

In the seventeenth century Combefis printed the text of “The Letter to the Emperor Theophilus concerning the Holy and Venerable Images,” which has long ago been proved spurious and apocryphal. The original and authentic text of the Letter, dated exactly April 836, was published in 1864 and republished in 1912–1913 under the title, “The Letter of the Three Oriental Orthodox [Melkite] Patriarchs to the Emperor Theophilus.”³¹ The difference between these two texts, insofar as it concerns our study, is that the spurious text gives a story of the edict of Yazid (Ἰεζά) which is almost an exact copy of the above text of Georgius Monachus (*P.G.* XCV, col. 356–357), and the original text fails to mention the story at all. For our study, therefore, the story which is found in the spurious text is to be dismissed as an interpolation reproducing the text of Georgius Monachus.³²

Cedrenus tells about several Jews from Laodicea, in Phoenicia, who came to the ruler of the Arabs, Yazid (Ἰζήθ), and promised him forty years

²⁹ *Martyres Constantinopolitani, Acta Sanctorum, Augustus, II, die nona augusti*, 435–436. See Arch. Sergius, *The Complete Liturgical Calendar (Menologion) of the Orient*, II, 2, 2nd ed. (Vladimir, 1901) 317–318 (in Russian): “The Holy Martyrs who, with Mary the Patrician, suffered Martyrdom for the Icons.” A. P. Rudakov, *Outlines in Byzantine Culture based on Data from Greek Hagiography* (Moscow, 1917) 250 (in Russian) (under Leo III in 729). N. Iorga, “Les origines de l’iconoclasm,” *Bulletin de la section historique de l’Académie roumaine*, XIII (1927) 142, n. 1. A. Fliche-V. Martin, *Histoire de l’Eglise*, V (Paris, 1938) 432, note “d.”

³⁰ τὰς οἰκείας φάλαγγας συναγείρων, Ἑλλήνων φημι παῖδας καὶ Ἰουδαίους, καὶ Σύρους, καὶ τῶν αἰρετικῶν τὰ στίφη. *Vita S. Stephani Junioris*, Migne, *P.G.*, C, 1116 B-C. See Ladner, *op. cit.* 131, n. 22.

³¹ I use the first spurious text in the edition of Migne, *P.G.*, XCV, 345–385 (erroneously published among the works of John of Damascus), and the second original text in the edition of L. Duchesne, *Roma e l’Oriente*, V, 225–239; 273–285; 349–366. Considering further the part played by Theophilus in this matter, it should be noted that the Egyptian historian Maqrizi (see L. Hautecoeur and G. Wiet, *Les mosquées du Caire*, I [Paris, 1932] 177), in his discussion of the iconoclasm of Theophilus, declares his attitude was caused by the fact that, to a painting of the Virgin Mary in one of the churches, had been added a breast from which milk flowed, drop by drop.

³² On these two texts of the *Letter* see the detailed discussion of A. Vasiliev, “The Life of St. Theodore of Edessa,” *Byzantion*, XVI, 1 (1942–1943) 216–225. See also Ladner, *op. cit.*, 131, n. 22. Iorga still believed that the *Epistola ad Theophilum* was a work of John of Damascus. *Histoire de la vie byzantine*, II (Bucarest, 1934) 32, n. 3. The spurious text of this letter was printed in German by Ch. W. F. Walch, *Entwurf einer vollständigen Historie der Ketzereien, Spaltungen und Religionsstreitigkeiten, bis auf die Zeiten der Reformation*, X (Leipzig, 1782) 153–155. See also C. T. Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte*, III, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1877) 375; in French, by H. Leclercq, *Histoire des Conciles*, III, 2 (Paris, 1910) 631.

of reign if he destroyed the icons in all the Christian churches of his realm. The foolish Yazid decided to issue an edict for that purpose, but by the grace of Christ and through the prayers of the Mother of God and all the Saints, he died without having had the time actually to send the decree throughout his empire; a year had not passed when the divine wrath befell him. His son wished to kill the Jews as false prophets, and, on learning this, they returned to the Isaurian region.³³

Zonaras seems to abbreviate the story of Georgius Monachus. During the reign of Yazid (ʿIzīd), two Jewish magicians, pretending to know the future through their astrological knowledge, came to him and promised a long reign if he threw out the images of Christ and His Mother from the churches. The barbarian, without delay, destroyed the holy icons in his empire, but the divine wrath very soon befell him. A year had not passed after he issued the edict when he died. His successor wished to kill the false prophets, but they succeeded in escaping to Isauria.³⁴

LATIN SOURCES

The Latin sources are devoid of interest for our study because they reproduce exactly their respective Greek originals.

Anastasius Bibliothecarius who lived in the ninth century, in his *Chronographia Tripertita* exactly reproduces, in Latin, the Greek text of Theophanes (de Boor, 401–402), which has been discussed above.³⁵

The same text of Theophanes was reproduced in Latin by another writer, Landulfus Sagax. This historian, about whom we know nothing but his name, lived during the time of the Byzantine emperors Basil II (976–1025) and Constantine VIII (976–1028), and, according to the latest editor of his *Historia Romana*, wrote before the year 1025, when Basil II died. Prior to the new edition, the work of Landulfus Sagax had been known generally as *Historia Miscella* and had always been connected with the work of the historian Paulus Diaconus.³⁶

³³ Cedrenus, I, 788. Cf. Georgius Monachus.

³⁴ Zonaras, XV, 3, 1–5; ed. Bonn, III, 257–258.

³⁵ Anastasius Bibliothecarius, *Chronographia Tripertita*, ed. de Boor.

³⁶ Landulfi Sagaxis, "Historia Romana, a cura di Amedeo Crivellucci," vol. I in *Fonti per la Storia d'Italia*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1912–1913). The text which interests us is XXIII, 17–18 (II, 193–194). Volume one opens with an ample preface (pp. VII–LV). Previously there were eleven editions of the work, all incomplete and interpolated. Through a misprint, the date of the death of Basil II is indicated as 1023 instead of 1025 (p. XXXVIII). I have also used the text printed in Migne, P.L., XCV, 739, under the lengthy title: *Historia Miscella ab incerto auctore consarcinata, complectens Eutropii Historiam, quam Paulus Diaconus multis additis . . . usque ad tempora Justiniani deduxit. Et Landulphus Sagax, seu quisquam alius continuavit usque ad annum Christi 816*. This title is taken from Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum*

One Latin text referring to Yazid's edict, although failing to supply us with any new material, deserves special attention.

As is well known, there were some repercussions of the iconoclastic troubles in the West, in the Frankish Kingdom. The Frankish bishops and Charlemagne rejected the Second Council of Nicaea. But this rejection did not mean that they openly sided with the iconoclasts, for they also rejected the iconoclastic Council of 754. They had holy images and wanted to keep them; but they thought that the Fathers of the Council of Nicaea had gone too far in encouraging what might be considered as idolatry. The Synod of Frankfurt condemned in 794 the Second Council of Nicaea. Some troubles continued after Charlemagne's death, and, under Louis the Pious, the Synod held at Paris in November 825 followed the decisions of the Synod of Frankfurt. At this Synod the bishops tried to find a middle way, but leaned definitely toward iconoclasm when they decided that pictures might be tolerated only as ornaments.³⁷

The Synod at Paris is interesting for our study because it raised the question: "Whence for the first time had the destruction of images in the Oriental churches originated" (*unde primum exorta sit in ecclesiis Orientalium imaginum destructio*)? The answer to this question, in the *Libellus Synodalis Parisiensis*, included, in an abridged form, the report of the Presbyter John, which he had read at the fifth session of the Council of Nicaea, and in which he had mentioned the names of the Caliphs Suleiman (Seleman), 'Omar (Humarus), and Yazid (Ezidus).

Here is the text of the fourteenth chapter of the Acts of the Synod: *Tyrannos quidam fuit Seleman nomine, Aggarenius genere. Quo defuncto successit Humarus in regno, cui iterum successit Ezidus, vir valde levis et insipiens. Huius enim temporibus erat quidam in Beriade maleficus ac divinus, Serantapicus nomine, praeceptor iniquorum Hebraeorum et inimicus Dei ecclesiae, qui, ut comperit levitatem Ezidi protosymboli, accessit ad eum, caepitque illi quaedam divinare ac praedicere. Illi autem ad hoc acceptabilis factus, ac nonmulto post ei dicere coepit: Benignitati tuae exponere volo, unde, me si audieris, addatur tibi longitudo vitae et perseveres in hoc principatu annos triginta, si quidem impleveris sermones meos. Ille vero insipiens tyrannus obscuratus mente desiderii longaevae vitae: Quicquid mihi, inquit, praeceperis paratus ad perficiendum existo et, si*

Scriptores, I. On Landulfus Sagax, see also a mention in M. Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur der Mittelalters*, I (1911) 263.

³⁷ On the Synod at Paris, see Hefele-Leclercq, *Histoire des Conciles*, IV, 1 (Paris, 1911) 44–48. Fliche-Martin, *Histoire de l'Église*, VI, *L'époque carolingienne* (Paris, 1947) 237–238. The author of this volume, Emile Amann, calls this Synod "un concile — ou plus exactement une assemblée consultative."

*consecutus fuero, quod pollicitus es, maximos tibi honores retribuam. Maleficus vero et divinus ait ad eum: Iube mox generalem scribere epistolam, quatinus omnis imaginaria pictura deletur in omnibus Christianorum ecclesiis sive in parietibus sive in vasis sacris et in vestibus altarium, et non solum haec, sed quae in civitatum plateis sunt adornatae. Quod audiens perfidus ille tyrannus praecepit omni praefecturae in cunctis locis ecclesiarum imagines et ceteras similitudines abolere et ita exornavit ecclesias Dei. Abhinc enim caeperunt corruptores imaginum inveniri. Sed ipse tyrannus anno altero mortuus est, et imagines in pristinum statum restitutae cum honore et cetera.*³⁸

SYRIAC SOURCES

If we turn to the Oriental evidence, we find that the Syriac sources are interesting for our study, first because they indicate that the execution of the edict was entrusted to the brother of the Caliph, an Arab general, Maslamas, who had laid unsuccessful siege to Constantinople in 717, second because they emphasize that Leo III opened his iconoclastic policy following Yazid's example.

In the ninth century the so-called Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius reveals that in the year 1035, according to the Seleucid era (723–724), Yazid ordered all the images to be torn down in all the places they could be found, either in the temples, or in the churches, or in the (private) houses. Therefore he sent the workmen to destroy the images wherever they were found.³⁹

Then the anonymous *Chronicon ad annum Domini 819 pertinens* records that Yazid ordered that all images and likenesses of bronze, wood, stone, and pigments in his dominions be destroyed.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Concilium Parisiense*, 825, mense Novembri. MGH, *Legum Sectio III. Concilia. Tomus II. Concilia aevi Karolini*, I, ed. A. Werminghoff, pars II (Hanover and Leipzig, 1908) 519–520. Also Mansi, XIV, 460. In Mansi, at the end of this text we read: *Hic desunt nonnulla*. As we see, in the *Libellus* of the Synod of Paris, only John's concluding statement is missing. It is not to be forgotten that the West had a very imperfect translation of the Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea.

³⁹ *Chronique de Denys de Tell-Mahré*. Quatrième partie, publiée et traduite par J.-B. Chabot (Paris, 1895) 17. On this anonymous chronicle, erroneously attributed to Dionysius of Tell-Mahré, see F. Haase, "Untersuchungen zur Chronik des Pseudo-Dionysios von Tell-Mahré," *Oriens Christianus*, VI (1916) 65–90; 240–270. A. A. Vasiliev, *Justin the First* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1950) 32. A special monograph of R. Abramowski, "Dionysios von Tellmahre, jakobitischer Patriarch von 818–845. Zur Geschichte der Kirche unter dem Islam," *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, XXV, 1 (Leipzig, 1940).

⁴⁰ *Chronicon Anonymum ad A.D. 819 pertinens*. Interpretatus est I.-B. Chabot, *CSCO, Scriptores Syri*, ser. 3, versio, t. XIV (Louvain, 1937) 11. The text of this chronicle has been reproduced by the anonymous author of the *Chronicon ad annum Domini 846 pertinens*, ed. and transl. by E. W. Brooks, in the *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, LI (1897) 584; transl. by Chabot, *CSCO, Scriptores Syri*, ser. 3, versio, t. IV (1904) 178.

In the twelfth century, Michael the Syrian, evidently relying on two different sources, writes twice about Yazid's decree. In the first passage he says that "Yazid, King of the Arabs [Taiyayê], commanded to tear down and break in pieces the paintings and statues of everything that lives and moves, from temples and buildings, from walls, from beams and stones; the images which were found in the books were lacerated."⁴¹ A little further on, after the above record dealing exclusively with the Caliph, Michael reproduces another text wherein he speaks about the iconoclastic policy of Leo III, and connects it with the decree of Yazid. He says: "At that time the Emperor of the Romans, Leo, following the example of the King of the Arabs, ordered images to be torn from the walls, and he destroyed the images which were in the churches and in the houses; those of the saints as well as those of the emperors and others. For this reason there was a revolution in the empire of the Romans, and many protests of the Romans arose against the Emperor."⁴²

In the thirteenth century the Syrian Jacobite Catholicos, Gregory Abul-Faraj, commonly known as Bar Hebraeus, also writes that Yazid commanded, and the images of every living being were obliterated from the temples, and from walls and wooden panels, and from stones and from books. And Leo, King of the Romans, also acted in this manner.⁴³

We learn a new detail from the anonymous chronicle known as *Chronicon anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, which carries events from the creation down to A.D. 1234. We read in the Chronicle: "In the following year [102 H = 720–721], Maslamas, on the order of his brother, the King [Yazid], commanded that all images should be destroyed either in temples, or on walls, or in [private] houses, as well as in books. And wherever was found a statue or an image, or a stone or a piece of wood, or ebony, they

⁴¹ *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, éd. et traduite par J.-B. Chabot, XI, 19, II (Paris, 1904) 489.

⁴² *Idem*, XI, 19, II, p. 491. On this passage see a very interesting remark of André Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Paris, 1936) 166–167. Grabar mentions a fact that occurred in the sixth century when some Oriental monks had torn a portrait of an emperor, which was in their monastery, without giving to this act of vandalism any character of a manifestation against the person of a specific sovereign. They seem to have acted rather as enemies of any image with figures, so that the similar attitude of the iconoclastic emperors appeared to them quite natural. Then, after reproducing the above passage from Michael the Syrian, Grabar remarks: "Writing far from Byzantium, Michael attributed to the iconoclastic emperors who were sympathetic to him, the acts which he himself would have committed as a good Semite and Monophysite Christian."

⁴³ Gregorii Abulpharagii sive Bar-Hebraei *Chronicon Syriacum*, ed. and transl. by P. J. Bruns and G. G. Kirsch. Translation (Leipzig, 1789) 124. Gregorius Bar-Hebraeus, *The Chronography*, transl. by E. A. W. Budge, I (London, 1932) 109. One of his basic sources was the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian.

broke it.”⁴⁴ From this chronicle we learn that Maslamas was commissioned to carry the edict into effect.

ARAB SOURCES

The Arab Moslem writers who recorded the edict of Yazid II lived in the tenth and fifteenth centuries and wrote in Egypt.

The historian Muhammad ibn-Yusuf al-Kindi, who flourished under the short-lived dynasty of the Ikhshidids (935–969) and died at al-Fustat in 961, wrote: “Yazid, son of ‘Abd-al-Malik, wrote in A.H. 104 [A.D. 722–723] ordering the statues to be broken; and all of them were broken, and the likenesses were obliterated. Among them, was broken a statue in the bath of Zabban-ibn-‘Abd-al-‘Aziz. . .”⁴⁵

From the tenth century, we must turn to the fifteenth. The most eminent historian under the Mamluk dynasty (1250–1517), the last dynasty in Egypt before the conquest of that country by the Ottoman Turks in 1517, was Taqi-al-Din Ahmad al-Maqrizi (1364–1442). In his fundamental work *Al-Khitat* (meaning “The Quarters of a Town”) or, “A Historical and Topographical Description of Egypt,” Maqrizi writes: “Then churches were destroyed; crosses were broken; likenesses were obliterated. All statues were destroyed – and they were many – in the year A.H. 104 [A.D. 722–723]. At that time, the caliph was Yazid, son of ‘Abd-al-Malik. And after Hisham-ibn-‘Abd-al-Malik had become caliph, he wrote to Egypt that the Christians might follow their customs, and that they should not thereafter be disturbed.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Chronicon Anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*. Interpretatus est J.-B. Chabot, CSCO, *Scr. Syri, ser. 3, versio, t. XIV* (1937) 240. On this chronicle see A. Vasiliev, *Justin the First*, 28–29. The year A.H. 102 = July 12, 720–June 20, 721.

⁴⁵ “*The Governors and Judges of Egypt or Kitāb el-Umarā’ (el-Wulāh) wa Kitāb el-Qudāh of el-Kindi*,” ed. by Rhuvon Guest (Leiden-London, 1912) 71–72, *E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series*, XIX. There are a few verses on Zabban’s bath. The most recent bibliography on al-Kindi in A. Vasiliev-M. Canard, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2 (Brussels, 1950) 44. Zabban was Yazid’s cousin. See T. W. Arnold, *Painting in Islam* (Oxford, 1928) 85.

⁴⁶ Here I am using the two-volume Bulaq edition (1270 = 1852), *Al-Khitat*, II, 493. In his French translation of this part of *Al-Khitat*, Paul Casanova gives a much shorter text: “Yazid ibn ‘Abd-al-Malik gave orders, in 104, to break idols and statues; all of them were broken and statues disappeared.” *Mémoires publiés par les membres de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire*, III (Cairo, 1906) 168. A new critical edition of *Al-Khitat* by G. Wiet, which was begun in Cairo in 1911, has not yet been completed; the last part of Wiet’s edition which I saw, is the first fascicle of the fifth volume published in 1927. It deals with the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs. See the warning against Casanova’s translation by J. Sauvaget, *Introduction à l’histoire de l’Orient musulman*, 82. The above Arabic text of Maqrizi, and its German translation have been published also by F. Wüstenfeld, “Macrizi’s Geschichte der Copten. Aus den Handschriften zu Gotha und Wien mit Übersetzung und Anmerkungen von F. W.,” *Abhandlungen der K. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, III (1847), in Arabic, p. 22, lines 7–10; in German, 55–56.

The other Egyptian historian, of Mamluk origin himself, Abu-l-Mahasin ibn-Tagribardi (1411–1469), wrote a history of Egypt from the Arab conquest down to 1453. He devoted three lines of his text to the edict of Yazid. We read: “Then came to the governor of Egypt a letter from the Caliph Yazid-ibn-‘Abd-al-Malik-ibn-Marwan [commanding] statues and pictures to be destroyed. All the statues, in his time, were broken, and the pictures in the houses of Misr and of other places were obliterated.”⁴⁷

After we have discussed the information about Yazid’s edict given by the two above-mentioned Arab historians, it is rather surprising to read a statement that no Arab author mentions the edict.⁴⁸

Of very great interest to this study is the work of the Egyptian Copt, Severus ibn-al-Muqaffa, who was a contemporary of the Alexandrian Patriarch Philotheos (979–1003), and who wrote in Arabic a history of the Alexandrian Patriarchs beginning with St. Mark. He was the first among the Coptic Christians to introduce the Arabic language into church literature.⁴⁹

In his work we do not have a mere reference to the edict of Yazid II, as it is given in the chronicles cited above. As a Christian, Severus describes the iconoclastic and other anti-Christian events which took place in Egypt with fierce indignation and deep hatred against the violators and offenders of the Christian faith in general. Severus’ records are of great importance because they reveal that the religious life within Egypt, under Moslem rule, had been full of trials and tribulations before the edict of Yazid; the edict may therefore be regarded as the culminating point of the preceding troublesome period, which came to a close after Yazid’s death in 724, when his successor Hisham (724–743) revoked the edict. Several records from Severus’ history may be interesting for our study. The first refers to the end of the seventh century, to the time of the Caliph ‘Abd-al-Malik (685–705) and to the time of the Patriarch Isaac, A.D. 686–689. The governor (Emir) of Egypt “ordered the destruction of all the crosses which were in the land

⁴⁷ *Abu-l-Mahasin ibn Tagribardi Annales*, ed. T. G. J. Juynboll and B. F. Matthes, I (Leiden, 1855) 278, lines 3–4. See A. Vasiliev-M. Canard, *op. cit.*, II, 2, 269. C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, 2nd ed., II (1949) 51–52.

⁴⁸ R. de Vaux, O. P., “Une mosaïque byzantine à Ma’in (Transjordanie),” *Revue biblique*, XLVII (1938) 256.

⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion of Severus’ historical work see Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, II (Città del Vaticano, 1947) 300–306. On the manuscript tradition and the continuation of the work see the preface of Chr. F. Seybold to his edition of the oldest manuscript: *Severus ibn-al-Muqaffa, Alexandrinische Patriarchen Geschichte von S. Marcus bis Michael I*, 61–767. *Nach der ältesten 1266 geschriebenen Hamburger Handschrift*, im arabischen Urtext herausgegeben von Christian Friedrich Seybold (Hamburg, 1912) p. V–IX. Veröffentlichungen aus der Hamburger Stadtbibliothek. Band 3. I will refer to this edition as *Seybold*.

of Egypt, even the crosses of gold and silver. And the Christians in the land of Egypt were troubled. Moreover, he wrote certain inscriptions and placed them on the doors of the churches at Misr and in the Delta, saying in them: ‘Muhammad is the great Apostle of God, and Jesus also is the Apostle of God. But verily God is not begotten and does not beget.’”⁵⁰

The second record I wish to cite here refers to the last year of the Caliph ‘Abd-al-Malik, i.e. 705, and to the patriarchate of Alexander II, A.D. 705–730. Here is the story:

“‘Abd-al-‘Aziz, the governor of Egypt, had a son, the eldest of his sons, called al-Asbagh. . . . He made him ruler over the whole country. . . . Al-Asbagh was a hater of the Christians, a shedder of blood, a wicked man, like a fierce lion. . . . On the Saturday of Light (i.e. the Saturday before Easter), al-Asbagh entered into the monastery of Hulwân, and looked at a picture which was adorned according to law.⁵¹ It was a picture of our Pure Lady Mary and of the Lord Christ in her lap; so when he looked at it and considered, he said to the bishops and to several people who were with him, ‘Who is represented in this picture?’ They answered, ‘This is Mary, the mother of Christ.’ Then he was moved with hatred against her, and filled his mouth with saliva, and spat in her face, saying, ‘If I find an opportunity, I will root out the Christians from this land. Who is Christ that you worship him like a God?’”⁵²

The story ends with the miserable death of al-Asbagh, upon whom God sent down vengeance, and with the death also of his father who died forty days later. It is known that ‘Abd-al-‘Aziz, brother of ‘Abd-al-Malik, died as governor of Egypt on May 12, 705,⁵³ and that the Caliph himself died the same year.

Then, according to Caetani, in the year A.H. 95 = September 26, 713–September 15, 714, new troubles occurred within the Egyptian church. As Severus writes: “A wicked edict was issued that the colored pillars and the marble which were in the churches should be taken away, and they were all

⁵⁰ Seybold, 121, lines 24–122. B. Evetts, “History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria,” III. Arabic text added, translated and annotated. *Patrologia Orientalis*, V (1947) 25 (279). See Caetani, *Chronographia Islamica*, 826 (21) (in the year A.H. 70 = June 25, 689–June 14, 690). G. Wiet, *Précis de l’histoire d’Égypte*, II (Cairo, 1932) 133.

⁵¹ Evetts translates these words: “being carried in procession, according to the rule.” (*P.O.*, V, 52 [306]).

⁵² Seybold, 134, lines 9–24. Evetts, 52 (306) – 54 (308).

⁵³ See G. Wiet, *Précis de l’histoire d’Égypte* (Cairo, 1932) 133, and G. Hanotaux, *Histoire de la nation égyptienne*, IV, *l’Égypte arabe*, by G. Wiet (Paris, 1937) 44. The order given by ‘Abd-al-Malik in 689–694, cited by G. Wiet, *Précis, loc. cit.*, referred only to religious emblems outside the churches.

carried off. And the Father Patriarch (i.e. Alexander II) was sad for the sake of his church.”⁵⁴

Later, according to Caetani, in the year A.H. 99 = August 14, 717–August 2, 718, the Caliph ‘Omar II set the churches and bishops free from taxes, so that “the Christians were secure and prosperous, and so were the churches.” But after that, continues Severus, ‘Omar “began to do evil, for he wrote a letter, charged with sadness, to Egypt, in which were written the following words: ‘Omar commands, saying, those who wish to remain as they are, and in their own country, must follow the religion of Muhammad as I do; but let those who do not wish to do so go forth from my dominions.’ And the Christians were oppressed by the governors and local authorities and by the Muslims in every place, the old and the young, the sick and the poor among them; and ‘Omar commanded that a poll-tax should be levied from all men who would not become Muslims.”⁵⁵

Then, in another record which belongs also to the time of the Patriarch Alexander II, but which deals with the reign of Yazid II, Severus does not limit himself to the fact of the issue of the edict only, but also tries to sketch a picture of Yazid’s general administration which was very harmful to the Christians, and unjust. Severus relates: “Then Yazid reigned after him, but we have no wish to relate or describe what happened in his days, on account of the miseries and trials; for he walked in the path of Satan, and deviated from the path of God. As soon as he undertook to govern, he restored the taxes of which ‘Omar had relieved the churches and bishops for one year; and he required great sums of money from the people, so that everyone in his dominions was distressed. And he was not satisfied only with this, but even issued orders that the crosses should be broken in every place, and the pictures which were in the churches should be wiped out. This he commanded, but the Lord Christ destroyed him for this reason, and took his soul after he had endured, before death, many sufferings. He reigned two years and four months. And after him reigned Hisham, his brother, who was a God-fearing man according to the law of Islam, and loved all men, and became the deliverer of the orthodox.”⁵⁶

The last record I wish to discuss belongs to the latter period of the patriarchate of Michael I, A.D. 744–768. It completes the picture of a certain uneasiness and animosity in the relations between Christians and Moslems under the Arab domination in Egypt, even after the repeal of Yazid’s edict.

⁵⁴ Seybold, 141. Evetts, 67 (321). See Caetani, *Chronographia Islamica*, 1164, 24.

⁵⁵ Seybold, 143–144. Evetts, 71–72 (325–326). Caetani, *op. cit.*, 1226, 32.

⁵⁶ Seybold, 144, lines 9–17. Evetts, 72–73 (326–327). See Caetani, *op. cit.*, 1265 (in the year A.H. 101 = July 24, 719 – July 11, 720).

This time the iconoclastic episode, of rather legendary character, takes place in Alexandria. Severus narrates: "And on a certain day the governor of Alexandria desired to launch the ships of the fleet on the sea. And there was a congregation of the orthodox — about ten thousand persons — in the church of our Lady Mary. And a young man of the Moslem saw, painted on the wall, a picture of the Lord Christ upon the Cross while a soldier with a spear pierced his side. So he said to the Christians, tempting them, 'What is this man upon the cross?' They answered, 'This is the sign of our God Christ, who died upon the cross for the salvation of the world.' Thereupon the young man took a rod, and mounted to the upper gallery, and pierced the picture on the other side, namely the left, mocking and blaspheming at the Christians' words." The story ends with the youth's miraculous punishment, which led him to confession of the Christian faith; he departed to a monastery and was baptized there.⁵⁷

ARMENIAN SOURCES

The Armenian sources are not devoid of interest for our study. First to be discussed here is the historical work of the *vardapet* Ghevond entitled "A History of the Wars and Conquests of the Arabs in Armenia." The author, who lived in the second half of the eighth century and at the beginning of the ninth, is almost a contemporary source. He relates:⁵⁸ "After the death of 'Omar, Yazid II [in the text Yezdegerd] ascended the throne and reigned six years.⁵⁹ This man of cruel character, guided by fanaticism, signalized his accession with a deplorable persecution of Christians. On his orders which were impregnated with a sort of diabolic frenzy, pictures representing the true incarnation of our Lord and Saviour were broken and destroyed, also the images of His disciples, as well as the crosses which had been erected in certain places so that the faithful might venerate before them the consubstantial Trinity. Still more excited by fanaticism, he at-

⁵⁷ Seybold, 179, lines 15–24; 180, lines 1–4. Evetts, V, 149–150 (403–404).

⁵⁸ *Histoire des guerres et des conquêtes des Arabes en Arménie par l'éminent Ghevond, vardabed arménien écrivain du huitième siècle*, traduite par Garabed V. Chahnazarian et enrichie de notes nombreuses (Paris, 1856) 98–99. See Manook Abeghyan, *History of Ancient Armenian Literature*, I (Erevan, 1948) 363–369 (in Russian). In 1944, A. Jeffery wrote that the date of Ghevond is somewhat difficult to determine, the latter half of the ninth century or even the beginning of the tenth century; the latter half of the tenth century would suit much better some of the Islamic references in the text. A. Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III," *The Harvard Theological Review*, XXXVII (October, 1944) 275–276. In 1951, H. Thorossian wrote that Ghevond very probably lived in the second half of the eighth century (720–790?). *Histoire de la littérature arménienne. Des origines jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1951) 108–109. Thorossian is not familiar with Jeffery's study.

⁵⁹ This is an error: Yazid ruled 720–724, i.e., four years.

tempted to attack the unshakable rock (Christ and His Church), and, being unable to subjugate it, he himself was broken against it. Reaching the height of his frenzy, he declared war on herbivorous and impure swine, and exterminated a great number of them throughout his dominions. It was the frenzy of Satan which drew him into this work of extermination. A suffocating illness, produced by Satan's frenzy, miserably destroyed him: a worthy chastisement inflicted, because of his crimes, by our Lord."

This piously written story of Ghevond confirms once more the fact of the edict itself, without supplying us with any new material. But another text by the same source allows us to state almost with certainty that the iconoclastic movement under Yazid II was very severe. Describing the Arab campaign against Constantinople in 717–719, which was conducted by Yazid's brother, Maslamas, Ghevond permits the latter to make a rather long speech to Leo III. I include here one passage from it which pictures the ambitious and aggressive character of the Arab general. He is supposed to have said: "Know that if thou refusest to become subject to our power, I declare to thee that I have committed myself by oath not to return to my native country before I have broken thy empire, pulled down the fortifications of this capital in which thou puttest all thy trust, made, out of the place of thy cult, the basilica of Saint Sophia, a bathhouse for my troops, and broken upon thy head the wood of the cross which thou adorest."⁶⁰

If we take into consideration the information, found in the Syriac *Chronicon anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens* discussed above, that the same Maslamas, Yazid's brother, was later entrusted with carrying the edict into effect, we may conclude that the man, who had threatened to make out of Saint Sophia a bathhouse for his troops and to break the cross upon Leo's head, must have been a violent executor of Yazid's edict; and we know, according to the Arabo-Coptic chronicle of Severus ibn-al-Muqaffa, that the iconoclastic persecution in Egypt was unusually severe.

A historian of the eleventh century, Stephen Asoghik of Taron (Daron), reproduces, in a very abridged form, the text of Ghevond, including his erroneous six years of Yazid's rule.⁶¹ In his turn Vardan (Vartan), historian of the thirteenth century, summarizes in one phrase the brief story of Asoghik.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, 104.

⁶¹ Here I use the German translation of H. Gelzer and A. Burckhardt, *Des Stephanos von Taron, Armenische Geschichte, aus dem altarmenischen übersetzt* (Leipzig, 1907), 94 (Izit). Asoghik completed his history in 1004. See Manook Abeghyan, *History of Ancient Armenian Literature*, I (Erevan, 1948) 437–442 (in Russian).

⁶² I use *La domination arabe en Arménie extrait de l'histoire universelle de Vardan*, traduit de l'arménien et annoté par J. Muiyldermans (Louvain-Paris, 1927) 104 (Izit).

If we now turn to the secondary sources referring to the edict of Yazid II, we see that, with very few exceptions, the historians who deal with his edict consider it a firmly established historical fact. They disagree, however, as to the problem of its connection with the iconoclastic policy of Leo III, as well as to whether or not this decree was carried into effect in the dominions of the Caliph, and whether the author of the decree was Yazid II, or 'Omar II, or Yazid I.⁶³

The doubts expressed by Wellhausen⁶⁴ and Musil,⁶⁵ regarding the existence of the decree of Yazid II and the story told by Theophanes, have been refuted by Creswell.⁶⁶

In 1938, J. Crowfoot wrote: "The fruits of Yazid's decree have been found in many places in Palestine, Transjordan and Egypt. In Gerasa [in Transjordan] the order was executed with the most punctilious discrimination. Inscriptions, decorative patterns, and pictures of buildings were spared, but all representations of living creatures were ruthlessly destroyed. The sorry way in which the mutilations, including mosaics, were repaired and patched up after the iconoclastic outbreak in Yazid's reign, shows the wretched plight of the Christians, though it proves also that the community survived and still used the churches."⁶⁷

The archaeologist J. E. Quibell attributed to the time of Yazid II the mutilation of the paintings and sculptures found during his excavations, in 1908–1910, at the Monastery of Apa Jeremias at Sakkara, in Egypt.⁶⁸

THE YEAR OF THE EDICT

As to the time of the issue of the edict, the sources are at variance. Yazid died, at the age of 35–38 years, on January 27, A.D. 724 (Sha'ban 25,

⁶³ Among the authors who attribute the iconoclastic edict to 'Omar II, are H. Leclercq. See K. Hefele-H. Leclercq, *Histoire des Conciles*, III, 2 (Paris, 1910) 627, n. 3, 630, n. 1. H. Leclercq, "Images (Culte et querelle des images)," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, VII (Paris, 1926) col. 231. Of those who have confused Yazid II with Yazid I, we may cite Finlay, Hergenröther, Bury. Finlay, *A History of Greece*, ed. by H. F. Tozer, II (Oxford, 1877) 26. J. Hergenröther, *Photius*, I (Regensburg, 1867) 227–228. J. B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene*, II (London, 1889) 388, n. 2.

⁶⁴ J. Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz* (Berlin, 1902) 202–203; in English, *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall*, transl. by Margaret Graham (Calcutta, 1927) 324–325. Against him, C. H. Becker, *Islamstudien. Vom Werden und Wesen der islamischen Welt*, I (Leipzig, 1924) 446.

⁶⁵ A. Musil, *Kusejr 'Amra*, I, Textband (Vienna, 1907) 155.

⁶⁶ K. A. C. Creswell, "The Lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam," *Ars Islamica*, XI–XII (1946) 163, n. 27.

⁶⁷ J. W. Crowfoot, "The Christian Churches [at Gerasa]" in *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis*, ed. by Carl H. Kraeling (New Haven, 1938) 172; *ibidem*, Kraeling, *History of Gerasa*, 69: he mentions Crowfoot's above suggestion. Creswell, *op. cit.*, 163, n. 28.

⁶⁸ Creswell, *op. cit.*, 163, n. 28. J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1908–9, 1909–10)*. The Monastery of Apa Jeremias (Cairo, 1912) iv.

A.H. 105), after about four years of rule. In his report at the Council of 787 John of Jerusalem stated that Yazid died two and a half years after the issue of the edict. It should not be forgotten that his report is the earliest document indicating the time of the edict, which had been compiled evidently before the year of the Council, perhaps in 764, as B. Melioransky infers.⁶⁹ Then, John himself, as the former *Syncellus* of the Patriarch of Antioch, had come from Syria – in other words, from the territory of the Caliphate – and reported the events which had taken place in his own region not so many years before, so that his information must have been correct. The same two-and-one-half-year period is indicated by the Patriarch Nicephorus, in the early part of the ninth century.⁷⁰ Following the statements of these two writers, and taking into consideration the exact date of Yazid's death, January 27, 724, the date of the edict should be July, A.D. 721. For further confirmation of this date, we may refer to the Egyptian historian of the end of the tenth century, Severus ibn-al-Muqaffa, who writes, as we have seen above, that the edict was issued as soon as Yazid took over the government. The Syriac source, known as *Chronicon anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, which we have mentioned above, relying on earlier sources, dates the edict in A.H. 102, i.e. July 12, 720–June 30, 721.⁷¹ Georgius Monachus, as well as Cedrenus and Zonaras, both of whom followed him, say that Yazid died before even a year had passed following the issuance of the edict, i.e. in 723. The Arab sources, al-Kindi and al-Maqrizi, also attribute the edict to the year 722/723 (A.H. 104 = June 12, 722–June 9, 723).⁷²

Theophanes defines the year of Yazid's edict by five chronological computations. According to him, the edict was issued in the year 6215 from the creation of the world. Since he uses here the so-called Alexandrian era, which started in 5492 B.C., the year for the issuance of the edict should be 723.⁷³ Then Theophanes says that it was issued the seventh year of the

⁶⁹ Mansi, XIII, 200: οὐ πλείω τῶν δύο ἡμισυ χρόνων βιώσας ἀπέθανε. See Melioransky, *George of Cyprus and John of Jerusalem*, 98.

⁷⁰ Migne, *P.G.*, C, 529–532. The text is given above.

⁷¹ *CSCO*, *Scr. Syri*, ser. 3, versio, t. XIV (1937) 240.

⁷² Georgius Monachus, ed. Muralt, 629; de Boor, II, 736: οὕτω γὰρ ἐνιαυτοῦ πληρωθέντος; in Old-Slavonic, Istrin, I, 468. Cedrenus, I, 788. Zonaras, XV, 3, 3; Bonn, III, 258. For references to the Arab writers see above.

⁷³ Theophanes, ed. de Boor, 401. On the very complicated problem of the eras used by Theophanes see G. Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates*, 2 ed. (Munich, 1952) 72–73, where the respective literature is indicated. Scholars vary in their opinions as to whether the Alexandrian era starts from the first of September or from the twenty-fifth of March. If I am not mistaken, the West-European scholars are not familiar with the Russian study by D. Lebedev, "The So-Called Byzantine Era from the Creation of the World. Place and Time of its Origin," *Vizantiskoe Obozrenie*, III, 1–2 (Yuryev, 1917) 1–52. See also, A. Vasiliev, "Medieval Ideas of the End of the World: West and East," *Byzantion*, XVI, 2 (1942–1943) 467–468.

Emperor Leo III (717–741), i.e. in 724; in the fourth year of Yazid (720–724), i.e. in 724; in the ninth year of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Germanus (715–730), i.e. in 724; and in the eighteenth year of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, John, or John V (707–745), i.e. in 724. Since Yazid II died on January 27, 724, all the data of Theophanes should mean that the edict was issued in 723, at the end of his rule. The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tell-Mahré attributes the issuance of the edict to the year 1035, according to the Seleucid era, which starts on the first of October, 312 B.C., i.e. to the year A.D. 723.⁷⁴

The decisive source for determining the year of Yazid's edict is the report, read at the Council of 787 by John of Jerusalem, who lived in the same eighth century, in the territory of the Caliphate, where the edict had been promulgated. As we have pointed out above, the period of two and one half years which, according to the report, elapsed from the moment of the issuance of the edict to Yazid's death on January 27, 724, supplies us, for the time of the edict, the month of July, A.D. 721. This year is the exact date of issue of the decree, which is confirmed by the Patriarch Nicephorus, by Severus ibn-al-Muqaffa, and by the late Syriac chronicle. Almost immediately on his accession Yazid promulgated the edict, which was violently carried into effect. The statement of those sources that his edict was hardly known among the people, and that he did not have enough time to see his decree executed, should be dismissed.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *Chronique de Denys de Tell-Mahré*, publiée et traduite par J.-B. Chabot (Paris, 1895) 7.

⁷⁵ The year 721 is indicated by Caetani in his *Chronographia Islamica*, 1284 (19), and by Creswell, *op. cit.*, 164, n. 32 (the end of July A.D. 721). Ed. Muralt, *Essai de chronographie byzantine*, I (St. Petersburg, 1855) 340.