

The Military Policy of Leo III and Constantine V
and Its Effect on Arab-Byzantine Warfare on the Taurus Border,
715-775 A.D.

by

CLINTON STAPLES

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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I

INTRODUCTION

The fortune of the Byzantine Empire over the course of the eighth century is an important part of any understanding of Byzantine history in general. The latter half of the seventh century saw the Empire constantly threatened by the expansion of Islam. The following century is generally considered to be a period of great difficulty for Byzantium, as it struggled for continued existence against Muslim forces. The respected Byzantinist J.B. Bury described the situation as follows: "Asia Minor, however, during the eighth century was as much exposed as ever to the inroads of the Moslem, who entered by the Cilician Gates and plundered in one year Cappadocia, and in one year 'Asia' or Opsikion."¹

In particular, the reigns of the first two Isaurian emperors, Leo III and his son Constantine V, have been seen as a period in which the Empire suffered extensively, not only from the external threat of the forces of Islam and of Bulgaria, but also from intense disruption due to the iconoclastic actions of its rulers.² This view is largely based upon the testimony of one ninth

¹ J.B. Bury, A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene, (395-800), Adolf M. Hakkert. Publ; (Amsterdam, 1966) 405; (1st ed. 1889).

² Louis Brehier states: "The achievements of the Isaurian emperors . . . consisted in halting the disintegration of the Empire and in protecting it against invasions; but the task was made difficult and incomplete by the internal troubles caused by the iconoclast movement, which brought about the loss of Italy and the West." Life and Death of Byzantium, (Paris, 1946) trans. M. Vaughan; North Holland Publ. Co; New York, 1977. See also M.V. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule, 717-842,"

century source, the Chronographia, written by the Byzantine monk Theophanes. Fiercely iconophile, Theophanes must be immediately suspect in his treatment of the two Emperors in question. In order to determine whether the reigns of the iconoclastic Emperors were as disastrous for the Empire as Theophanes would have us believe, it is necessary to re-evaluate their reigns in the light of other sources.

The Chronographia is the most significant Byzantine source for the events of the eighth century and is often the only Byzantine source to comment upon a particular matter. This means that one often has to take much of what it says at face value. It is obvious that Theophanes has a strong bias against the iconoclastic ideology. However, beyond allowing for some conscious (or perhaps unconscious) alteration or omission on Theophanes' part, it is not possible precisely to discern what Theophanes might have altered or omitted. Other primary sources are required more fully to assess Theophanes' testimony.

There is only one Byzantine source which contributes significantly to a more critical understanding of Theophanes' treatment of the eighth century - the Breviarium of Nikephorus, a Patriarch of Constantinople and a contemporary of Theophanes. The Breviarium records events of the seventh and eighth centuries and provides us with the means to check some of Theophanes statements, but its utility in this respect is quite limited and one must look elsewhere for further corroboration.³

Cambridge Medieval History, c.3, v.4, pt.1, 1966, 61-108; and C. Diehl, History of the Byzantine Empire, (1st ed. 1919) AMS Press, New York, 1967, 53-72.

³ See below, p.20-1, concerning the limitations of the Breviarium as a means for the corroboration of the statements of Theophanes.

There are several Muslim chroniclers of considerable value in such a study. They deal with the eighth century, often in more detail than do Theophanes and Nikephorus, and they have much to say concerning their Byzantine neighbors. The chronicler and theologian Tabari provides one such source in the Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-muluk, a chronicle of the history of the world to his own time (d.923). The geographer and historian Baladhuri (d.893) in his Kitab Futuh al-Buldan deals with the origins of Islam and has much of interest for Byzantine studies. Other Muslim sources such as Yakubi, ibn al-Tiqtaqa, Masudi, and the anonymous Khitab al-Uyun and Hudud al-Alam may also contribute to our understanding of the Empire in the eighth century. There is much of value to the Byzantine historian in a comparison of these texts with those of Theophanes and Nikephorus.

Also well worth taking into consideration, is the Chronography of Bar-Hebraeus (otherwise known as Gregory Abu Faraj). Although of comparatively late date (late 13th century), Bar-Hebraeus contributes information not available elsewhere and he often appends that which is found in other sources dating closer to the period under review.

Although all the sources mentioned deal with the period under review (716-775), the events recorded in one source rarely correspond directly to those set down in any other. There is, however, one subject which appears to have generated a significant amount of interest in all of the authors, and particularly in the Muslim writers. That subject is Byzantine-Arab military interaction. In fact, the Empire is only rarely mentioned in any other context by the Arabic sources. For this reason it is possible to do a comparative analysis of military affairs for the greater part of the eighth century, drawing upon both Byzantine and Arab sources to provide a detailed picture of Byzantine fortunes in this

troubled time.

By taking the evidence of the non-Byzantine writers into account, the present work will attempt to trace the military fortunes in Anatolia, first of Leo III, and then of his son, Constantine V. In the process, an attempt will also be made to analyse the actions of both father and son for signs of a coherent military policy, as well as to assess its feasibility. It is hoped that a rigorous analysis of the wars of the Taurus frontier during the period 716-775 may lead to a better understanding of the reigns of the first two Isaurian emperors and of this crucial period in the history of the Empire.

II

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Much has been written in the last century concerning Leo III and Constantine V. These two controversial figures lived in an extremely volatile period of Byzantine history and could hardly have escaped the scrutiny of historians. However, the focus of much of this scrutiny has centered upon one issue - the single greatest dogmatic issue of the eighth and early ninth centuries - Iconoclasm.⁴ While it is certain that both Leo and Constantine were centrally involved in the iconoclastic controversy during their lifetimes, it does not necessarily follow that Iconoclasm was the only, or even the greatest, concern which they had to face. It is not the purpose of the present work to concern itself with Iconoclasm. Here an attempt will be made to address another major aspect of the reigns of the first two Isaurian Emperors: the Arab Wars.

The military ability of Leo and Constantine has long been recognised by historians. However, most assessments are rather vague and have rested

⁴ See n.2, for a number of works which treat iconoclasm as the major crisis of the eighth century. See also Ch.V, 'the Iconoclastic Epoch, 717-867,' in A.A. Vasiliev, History of the Byzantine Empire, University of Wisconsin press, Madison, 1961, 234-299; and Ch.III, 'The Age of Iconoclastic Crisis, 711-843,' in G. Ostrogorsky, History of the Byzantine State, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1956, 130-186. More recently there is S. Gero, Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Leo III: with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Louvain, 1973, n.41; and Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V: with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Louvain, 1977, n.52. In addition, there is a wealth of articles which deal with the Isaurians and the icons.

primarily upon the information provided by Theophanes. The addition of the Arabic sources allows for a more detailed analysis of the situation. The majority of the historians dealing with this subject have either ignored or slighted the non-Byzantine evidence and have not given the complex question of Arab-Byzantine conflict detailed treatment.⁵

E.W. Brooks provided the historian interested in Arabic incursions into Byzantine territory with several works of inestimable value.⁶ In these articles Brooks compiled and translated many references to Arabic invasions of Byzantine lands during the first two centuries of Islam. While his efforts made this valuable information available to Byzantinists, they may have inadvertently led to a somewhat skewed picture of events. Since Brooks' purpose was to record any reference to Arabic raids made by various Arabic authors, he was not concerned with reporting on the martial endeavors of their enemies, the Romans. Thus, one might easily conclude that the Arabic writers are silent upon any military action initiated by the Byzantines, and that the only such mentions are to be found in Byzantine texts - primarily Theophanes. This is not the case, but it would appear that for the better part of the last one hundred years, historians

⁵ In reference to the military situation of Constantine's time, Bury states: "We need not pursue all the details of the hostilities between the Empire and the Caliphate in the reign of Constantine V, Leo's son and successor. On the whole the Empire was successful." Bury, Later Roman Empire, (395-800), 406.

⁶ E.W. Brooks, "The Arabs in Asia Minor (641-750) from Arabic Sources," Journal of Hellenic Studies, 18 (1898), 182-208; also, "Byzantines and Arabs in the Time of the Early Abbassids," English Historical Review, 15 (1900), 728-47; and, "Byzantines and Arabs in the Time of the Early Abbassids,II," English Historical Review, 16 (1901), 84-92.

who have commented upon the fortunes of the Byzantines against their Muslim neighbours have accepted this conclusion.

J.B. Bury, writing in 1889, was aware of the Arabic material but appears still to have relied primarily upon Theophanes and Nikephorus the Patriarch.⁷ Bury's work is guardedly favourable to Leo, but concerning the military situation he briefly relates Theophanes' version of the siege of Constantinople in 718, and of the battle of Acroinon in 739. By effectively relying upon the Byzantine material, Bury renders himself unable to assess the military program of Leo in any detail. For Constantine's wars, he has even less information from which to draw.⁸

Charles Diehl viewed all the actions of Leo and Constantine as part of a grand plan for government which encompassed political, economic, moral, legal, and religious aims. He characterizes both father and son as capable and far-sighted, but his primary goal was to attempt to place iconoclasm in, what was to him, its proper context.⁹

Many of the leading Byzantinists of this century have echoed Bury's sentiments regarding Leo and Constantine. In 1928, A.A. Vasiliev praised Leo's martial prowess: "The problem of the Arab struggle, then, was brilliantly solved

⁷ Bury, The Later Roman Empire, (395-800), 408.

⁸ See above, n.5.

⁹ C. Diehl, History of the Byzantine Empire, 57.

by Leo III."¹⁰ He concludes by stating that Constantine was able: "... [to] move the imperial border farther east along the entire boundary of Asia Minor by means of a number of successful expeditions."¹¹

In Byzantine Civilization, published in 1933, Steven Runciman followed in the well worn path of Bury and Vasiliev, stating that Leo: "... triumphantly preserved the capital through the great Arab siege of 717-718, and in his later wars beat the infidel back to the Taurus frontier."¹² Concerning Constantine's generalship, Runciman's praise is even greater. However, he appears to have based his assessment heavily upon Theophanes, attempting in this instance to read beyond the anti-iconoclastic polemic. Yet in his characterization of Constantine, Runciman rather naively accepted Theophanes' accounts of Constantine's debauchery and participation in: "... Mock-ritual and Black Mass," a charge which must be treated carefully, given Theophanes' obvious hatred of the Emperor and his religious beliefs.¹³

George Ostrogorsky, writing in 1940, follows Runciman in his estimation of the Isaurian Emperor as able military men. However, he also reiterates Runciman's opinion of Constantine's character, taking Theophanes' testimony of Constantine's moral excesses for granted.¹⁴ Ostrogorsky also faults the

¹⁰ Vasiliev, History of the Byzantine Empire, 238.

¹¹ ibid, 238.

¹² S. Runciman, Byzantine Civilization, Edward Arnold Publ; London (1933), 43.

¹³ Runciman, 212.

Emperor's lack of fore-sight in allowing Rome and the Empire's titular Italian holdings to drift into the orbit of the Frankish court.¹⁵

Ostrogorsky demonstrates his familiarity with the Arabic writers, pointing out that Tabari's historical work is of great value to the Byzantinist. However, having said that, he appears to have relied primarily on Theophanes and Nikephorus.¹⁶

Louis Bréhier's 1946 work *Vie et mort de Byzance*, saw the importance of the Isaurian Emperors to be in: ". . . halting the disintegration of the Empire, and in protecting it from invasions."¹⁷ Yet he faults both father and son for causing religious strife: ". . . at a time when every dogmatic quarrel had ceased and religious peace seemed assured."¹⁸ Iconoclasm, brought into being by Leo and made more rigorous by Constantine, was to complicate the task of maintaining the Empire in the face of its enemies and ultimately, to bring about the loss of Italy and the West.

Milton Anastos believed that Leo and Constantine could only do as they did concerning iconoclasm. He felt that the Isaurians were acting from the staunch conviction that the worship of icons endangered the future of the

¹⁴ Ostrogorsky, 149.

¹⁵ *ibid*, 152.

¹⁶ *ibid*, 131.

¹⁷ Bréhier, 52.

¹⁸ *ibid*, 52.

Empire. Thus, as devout instruments of God's will, they had no choice but to attempt to correct the error in the faith. Although Anastos did portray Constantine as an able soldier, his primary purpose was to place the issue of iconoclasm in its proper context.¹⁹

More recently, Stephen Gero has attempted to shed new and more favourable light upon the Isaurians by working with the oriental sources.²⁰ He is interested primarily in dogmatic issues, however certain aspects of his approach are of value. While he met with only limited success in his efforts and certain methodological difficulties are apparent in his work, Gero's original supposition is valid. The oriental material can be of great value in an understanding of any aspect of the reigns of Leo III and Constantine V.

In The Byzantine Revival, W. Treadgold focuses upon the resurgence of the Empire in the ninth century under such rulers as Nicephorus I (802-11), and Theophilus (829-42).²¹ This, in turn, led to the powerful and united Byzantium of the tenth century military emperors. Treadgold sees the actions of the Empress Irene, both during the reign of her son Constantine VI (780-97) and in her own right (797-802), as being the first sign of recovery for the Empire and the

¹⁹ M.V. Anastos, "Iconoclasm and Imperial Rule, 717-842," Cambridge Medieval History, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1966), c.3, v.4, pt.1, 61.

²⁰ S. Gero, Iconoclasm During the Reign of Leo III, and Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V. See also "The Legend of Constantine V as Dragon-Slayer," Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies, 19, (1978), 155-159, in which Gero further develops his thesis that Constantine has been maligned unduly by Theophanes.

²¹ W. Treadgold, The Byzantine Revival, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1988.

precursor of the resurgence to follow. He is silent concerning Leo III, but follows the standard assessment of Bury and Bréhier in summarizing Constantine V's achievements:

The result of Constantine's reign of thirty-five years were not particularly impressive. In his many campaigns against the Bulgars and Arabs he suffered only one or two major defeats, but he did no lasting damage to either enemy and gained no territory for his empire. During his reign central Italy including Rome, slipped from the empire's possession, leaving Byzantium and the West increasingly estranged from one another. Constantine did amass a large amount of gold, which he spent liberally on his army, but accomplished this only by limiting other spending strictly and by confiscating the property of iconophile monasteries. His enforcement of iconoclasm made enemies of most men of rank and education and little art and very little literature was produced during his reign.²²

Treadgold faults Constantine for maintaining a strong military at the expense of other concerns at a time when the Empire's future was by no means assured. In contrast, he praises the Empress Irene for turning the army over to bureaucrats and for paying exorbitant bribes to hold the Arabs across the Taurus.

J.F. Haldon has analysed Isaurian military fortunes under Leo and Constantine with specific emphasis upon the frontier district and the effect of constant raid and counter-raid. In Haldon's assessment, Leo was barely able to

²² Treadgold, 7.

maintain an imperial presence in eastern Asia Minor. Offensively, Leo was limited to a single significant victory at Akroinon in 740, which Haldon believes was of merely symbolic importance.²³ Concerning Constantine, Haldon points out that his victories against the Arabs were largely as a result of the distraction provided by the Abbasid Revolution. Haldon claims that after the revolution the Abbasid regime came to accept the existence of the Byzantine Empire and thus reduced the military pressure along the Caucasus border.²⁴

As may be seen from the preceding pages, the Isaurian emperors have generally been treated in the light of their religious programs. This view has often led to a negative assessment of the reigns of Leo and Constantine entirely. While it is certainly the case that iconoclasm was an unpopular stand for the emperors and did cause them difficulties, it does not necessarily follow that the other policies pursued were also failures. In relation to the military situation in the eighth century this is especially the case. Neither Leo nor Constantine can realistically be faulted for the inability to conquer the Caliphate, or even for the loss of Italy and Rome. The genius of the Isaurians lay in their ability to perceive what was within the realm of the possible and to strive to accomplish it. It will be demonstrated that Leo pursued a cohesive policy concerning the Arab Wars: a policy which benefitted the Empire and one which the Empire was capable of

²³ J.F. Haldon, Byzantium in the Seventh Century, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1990, 84.

²⁴ ibid, 84.

achieving. By Constantine's reign matters had changed. It was possible for Constantine to take the offensive in a limited way and to demonstrate to the Muslims that Asia Minor no longer was so accessible as it once had been. The analysis which follows will attempt to delineate the military programs of first Leo and then Constantine, as well as to determine the success or failure of these programs.

III

BYZANTINE SOURCES

In order more fully to comprehend the relationship of the various sources to each other and to Theophanes, a greater understanding of the writers themselves and of their historical and historiographical context is necessary.

First Theophanes: the best known of the Byzantine chroniclers that deal with the eighth century, he was a monk, born sometime between 752-60.²⁵ His family was respected, pious and probably iconophile. Constantine V himself supervised the young Theophanes' education. Theophanes later became a spatharios (a minor court official), and then shortly after the death of Leo IV (780), when monks were no longer immediately suspect as iconophiles, he founded a monastery near Sigriane. There he lived in poor health until 815-816, which saw the outbreak of a new bout of iconoclasm. Punished for his iconophile sentiments and obstinacy, he was imprisoned and later exiled to Samothrace. He died there in 818 and subsequently was revered as a martyr.

²⁵ The biography of Theophanes presented here draws upon the more detailed one provided by H. Turtledove, The Chronicle of Theophanes, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia (1982), vii-ix.

There is no evidence to suggest that Theophanes produced any work other than the Chronographia. He wrote within the tradition of the chronicle. Chroniclers generally wrote for a less educated audience than did the historians of Byzantium, and consequently did not use the esoteric and archaic prose favored by contemporary writers of history. Chroniclers also dealt with a longer period and did so in less detail, giving a year by year account of events. Historians generally treated their material chronologically but were not constrained to grouping their entries under annual headings.

The earliest chronicle to survive is that of John Malalas, a near contemporary of Prokopios, the well known historian of Justinian the Great. Whereas Prokopios confined his record primarily to the events of the reign of Justinian and recorded these events in great detail, Malalas' chronicle begins with the creation and continues to the death of Justinian I (14 November 565). Turtledove describes the *modus operandi* of Byzantine historians such as Prokopios thus: "Byzantine historians dealt with discreet chunks of time, usually a half century or less, which they treated with considerable detail".²⁶ The historian took it upon himself to address the questions raised by the text concerning the events described, their causes and effects. Byzantine chroniclers were rarely troubled by such matters, preferring instead to set down the information with little attention to its causation or to ascribe causation to divine

²⁶ ibid, ix.

judgement.

Theophanes' Chronographia rarely has entries of more than a few hundred lines per year, and often considerably less. It deals with the period 284-813 A.D., from the accession of Diocletian up to the death of Michael I. Turtledove believes that Theophanes wrote the Chronographia specifically as a continuation of the Chronicle of George the Synkellos, another monk who began his chronicle with the time of Adam and had reached 284 A.D. by his own death (c.810-11).²⁷ The date of completion for the Chronographia is not known with absolute certainty, however it must have been after 813, the *terminus post quem* of the work, and before 818, and the death of Theophanes.²⁸ Up to the year 602, Theophanes is dependant on extant sources; however, for the period from 602-813 none of the original writings which Theophanes may have consulted has survived, indeed few sources from this critical period have survived the dislocations of the seventh century, the iconoclastic purges of the eighth, and the reaction of the iconophiles in the ninth.²⁹ The period of interest for the present

²⁷ ibid, xi.

²⁸ Turtledove believes that the Chronographia must have been written after 815, based on Theophanes' statement on the current iconoclastic activity of the then reigning (but unspecified) monarch, xi. This would coincide with the resurgence of iconoclasm under Leo V in 815.

²⁹ Turtledove, xv; who also notes that: "Later Byzantine Chroniclers, even such eminent men as George Kedrenos in the eleventh century, and John Zonaras in the twelfth, seemed to have used Theophanes as their guide rather than the primary sources he himself employed"; ibid, xi. He further mentions that Theophanes was known to the West as early as the second half of the ninth century in a Latin translation; ibid, xviii.

study is from the early years of the eighth century, which saw the rise of the future Emperor Leo III, to the death of his son Constantine V in 775.

This period of intense conflict over the use of icons in Christian worship was also a crucial period in the expansion of the Islamic territories and in the continued survival of the Byzantine Empire. Due to Theophanes' intense loyalty to the icons and the equally rigorous iconoclasm of the Emperors in question, one has to be sceptical of Theophanes' treatment of these emperors. This is doubly important when dealing with the final period of the Chronographia, from the reign of Constantine V onward. Born sometime in the 750s, Theophanes would have been raised during the height of Constantine's iconoclasm. Thus Theophanes' greatest source for these years is his own memory of the reign of the man he villifies in his work.

Concerning the period prior to that of his own lifetime, Theophanes possesses some surprisingly detailed information on Muslim activities in the eighth century. Turtledove credits this to Theophanes' use of a Greek translation of a late eighth-century Syriac work which has not survived.³⁰ Had this work survived it might have been possible to know whether Theophanes intentionally omitted details concerning the eastern border region, or whether his source was incomplete.

The only other major Byzantine source for the eighth century is the

³⁰Turtledove, xv.

Breviarium of Nikephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople. Nikephorus was born to a prominent Constantinopolitan family about 758.³¹ His father, Theodore, was an asekretis (imperial secretary) and an iconophile, who was denounced and exiled to Pontos in the 760s. Later Theodore was recalled but refused to deny his iconophile sentiments and was again exiled, this time to Nicaea. Nikephorus received an education that prepared him for official service, which he entered and became an asekretis under the future Patriarch Tarasius, probably in the reign of Leo IV (775-780).

Nikephorus continued in various posts within the civil service until the death of Tarasius in 806. The Emperor Nikephorus (802-11), after consulting the leading clergymen of the day and finding no consensus, determined to make Nikephorus patriarch. Though he was still a layman, Nikephorus was rushed through the orders of monk, deacon, presbyter and bishop and was confirmed as patriarch on Easter Day of 806. He remained patriarch under Michael Rhangabé (811-13), but was removed in 815 by Leo V (813-20), when he refused to acquiesce to a new bout of iconoclasm. Nikephorus retired to a monastery north of Chrysopolis but soon after was forced to move to the monastery of St. Theodore's. Michael II (820-29) offered him the opportunity of return to the post of patriarch on the condition that he remain silent concerning icons. Nikephorus

³¹ The following biography of Nikephorus is abstracted from Mango's introduction to his translation of Nikephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople, Short History, trans. C. Mango; Dumbarton Oaks texts no.10; Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C. 1990; 1-16.

refused, continuing to lead the life of a monk until his death in 828.

In addition to the Breviarium, Nikephorus wrote several other works, three of which have survived. Two are polemical pieces which, says Mango:

... contain a certain amount of historical information designed to demonstrate that the period of iconoclasm and, in particular, the reign of Constantine V was a time, not of success and prosperity, but of calamity...³²

Both contain largely the same material as is found in the Breviarium, though some minor items appear which are of little interest presently. Nikephorus also composed a set of chronological tables, but his most historically significant work is the Breviarium itself.

The Breviarium treats the period from the accession of Phokas (602-10) to the marriage of the future Leo IV to Irene in 769.³³ In contrast to Theophanes, who wrote within the tradition of the chronicle, Nikephorus wrote a history and aimed for a more sophisticated audience. Thus, he was bound by his use of this genre to appear to be more objective in his treatment of the period.³⁴

³² These are the Third Antirheticus (PG 100,493 Dff), and the unpublished Refutatio et aversio. Mango, 2.

³³ Two redactions of this work are extant. The Vatican MS is the more complete of the two, covering the period stated above. The London MS ends abruptly in 713 with the overthrow of Phillipicus (711-13). Both MSS are completely silent concerning the reign of Constantine IV (641-668). See Nikephorus, Short History, trans. Mango, 5.

³⁴ ibid, 9.

Nikephorus' purpose in writing the Breviarium seems to have been to continue the work of Theophylact Simokatta whose work ends in 602.³⁵ There is no internal evidence that can provide a date for the writing of the Breviarium.³⁶

Mango suggests that Theophanes and Nikephorus relied upon a common source for their treatment of the period under discussion, one which he claims: ". . . there is no reason to believe . . . was anti- iconoclastic."³⁷ He also remarks upon the oddity that, even though Theophanes and Nikephorus drew upon the same source, they were writing entirely independently of one another. They were close contemporaries, of the same ecclesiastical persuasion and in the civil service within the capital at the same time. Mango speculates that both works remained uncirculated for some time after their completion and that the scholarly circle of the Empire may not have been as close as modern researchers might like to believe.³⁸

The Chronographia and the Breviarium provide for the student of

³⁵ ibid,7; in turn citing P.J. Alexander, The Patriarch Nikephorus of Constantinople, Oxford (1958), 157-8. Theophylact of Simokatta wrote a history which continued that of Prokopios and ended with the murder of Maurice and the usurpation of Phokas in 602. see, Theophylacti Simokattae Historiae, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig,1887).

³⁶ Mango tentatively suggests a date sometime in the 780s; p. 12.

³⁷ ibid, 9; who adds, " From 668 to the end, the Breviarium and Theophanes run in parallel channels and are quite clearly derived from the same source. To be more precise, there is very little in Nikephorus that is not also in Theophanes, whereas the latter includes a considerable body of other material, some of it Near Eastern in origin . . . The source was certainly a chronicle composed in the capital and it appears to have been favorable to Leo III.", 15.

³⁸ ibid, 12.

Byzantine history a significant amount of information with which to analyze the events of the eighth century. However, due to the intellectual predilections of Theophanes and Nikephorus, their texts must be considered highly suspect concerning the iconoclast Emperors. With the exception of a few minor sources such as the Chronography of Gregory abu Faraj (Bar Hebraeus, d.1286) and the sparse hagiographical records which survived the crosscurrents of censorship at work in eighth and ninth century Byzantium, the dearth of other Byzantine sources forces one to go farther afield and look beyond the boundaries of the Empire.

IV

SOURCES - MUSLIM

There are no works extant of Muslim chroniclers who were contemporary with Theophanes. However, several works that are now lost have been preserved by later authors in an abbreviated form. The course of Muslim historiography is far removed from that of the Byzantines; an explanation is necessary.

Early Muslim historiography was composed largely of native Arabic elements. The earliest historical writings consist of what Somogyi calls: "the collections and commentaries of the narratives, customs, and institutions of Arab paganism (al-akhbar) on the one hand, and the genealogical studies (al-ansab) on the other".³⁹ With the conversion of the Arabs to Islam the already thriving written traditions of 'al-akhbar' and 'al-ansab' were adopted and modified to become one pursuit with two foci - traditions concerning the life of the Prophet Muhammad and those recording the first wars of Islam.⁴⁰

From this interest in the rise of the Prophet and of Islam evolved the hadith. Lewis defines hadith as:

³⁹ Somogyi, J. de, "The Development of Arabic Historiography", Journal of Semitic Studies, III, 1958, 374.

⁴⁰ ibid, 374.

traditions purportedly to preserve the decisions, actions and utterances of the Prophet, a vast heterogenous assemblage of individual traditions, each relating some detail of the precept and practise of the Prophet and varying greatly in provenance, content, and plausibility.⁴¹

These hadith were extra-Quranic traditions which were legitimized in practise by an isnad. In fact, hadith are made up of an isnad and a matn. The isnad is a chain of authorities which originally reached back to some source that was in the presence of the Prophet, and who ostensibly is the one speaking in the matn. Williams gives an excellent example and decription of the hadith, isnad and matn:

[Buhkara set down from Abd al-Aziz ibn Abdallah from Ibrahim ibn Sad from his father from Abdallah ibn Jafar ibn Ali Talib]: "I saw the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, eating fresh dates with cucumbers." The part within the brackets is the isnad; that within the quotation marks is the matn. Change the matn and we have a different hadith.⁴²

Early Muslim chroniclers used the same hadith format of isnad and matn

⁴¹ Lewis, B., ed. Islam: From the Prophet Mohammed to the Capture of Constantinople, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1974, Volume 2, xviii.

⁴² Al-Tabari, The Early Abbasid Caliphate, trans. J.A. Williams; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1988), vol.1 of 2, xvi;

These hadith are the basis of Muslim jurisprudence, just as the Quran is the basis of Muslim law. An individual who interprets the hadith is called a faqih, and may inspire a following who hold to the same interpretation. In this way, Muslim schools of law formed. Tabari inspired one such school; his enemies, the Hanbalites, were the followers of another, founded by Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

when they wrote history.⁴³ Thus, a typical entry in a Muslim record purports to be an eyewitness account of the subject described. The legitimacy of the hadith is judged by the authenticity of the isnad. However, Muslim historians and chroniclers who made use of the hadith style generally included any hadith which had at least a plausible isnad. Thus it is not uncommon to find different accounts of the same subject in the work of one chronicler; because the chronicler could not determine that one isnad was obviously false.

To summarize, a chapter in a Muslim chronicle of the hadith variety consists of a number of hadith - each made up of an isnad and a matn - which relate to the year's events. Often one or more of the hadith concerns the same subject, as observed by various principals or as related by different intermediaries. Arguably, some continuity might be lost in such a format; however, to a reader knowledgeable in the field of Arabic historiography, it provided a system of references to which he could address himself, in much the same way that modern footnoting provides a method for the corroboration of information. At the end of each yearly entry, the chronicler would often include other pieces of information, generally in a comparatively superficial fashion, which have no isnad, and are often the remarks of the chronicler himself.

In the early tenth century A.D., Muslim historiography underwent a

⁴³ Lewis, Islam, Volume 2, xx, suggests that the adoption of hadith by historians and chroniclers was encouraged by the early Ummayyad rulers, who wished to increase the authority of their position through association with the Prophet.

further development. Islamic historical works began to take the form of a continuous narrative without any use of the isnad and matn, or of individual hadith. The writer took the various hadith with which he was familiar and transformed them into a single homogeneous account which best represented the information in his possession. Neither Baladhuri (d.892) nor Tabari (d.923) were of this tradition, but were almost certainly familiar with it. Masudi (d.956) had already adopted this style. Thus, by the beginning of the fourth century of Islam, Muslim chronicles began to appear similar to their Byzantine counterparts.

Arabic chronicles were usually arranged as annals; however, the geography - which is also of great interest to historians - was organised somewhat differently. In these texts the author organized his subject district by district, relating information of interest about the major geographical features of each region. Within the account of the region events generally were dealt with chronologically, but dates were provided less often and the entries were not arranged as annals.

Although Arabic chroniclers rarely wrote geographies, the two fields were closely related. Arabic geographers were interested primarily in what would today be called human geography and often recorded details of the cultures, local history and various anecdotal stories of a region rather than information concerning its physical landscape. Baladhuri was a geographer and his interest in the history of the Caucasus provides the Byzantine historian with

valuable information concerning the frontier. The anonymous Hudud al-Alam (dating to the tenth century A.D.) is also of use in this regard. With an understanding of the basis of Islamic historiography, it is now possible to discuss the various Muslim works and authors under consideration.

Ahmad ibn-Yahya ibn-Jabir al-Baladhuri (d.892) was of Persian ancestry and a native of Baghdad. His grandfather was a court functionary to the Caliph Harun al-Rashid. Ahmad himself was a confidant of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil as well as to Caliph al-Mustain, and tutor to the son of another, al-Mutazz. In addition to being a distinguished poet and satirist, Baladhuri wrote Futuh al-Buldan, which itself was a condensation of a larger work of unknown date which is now lost. He also wrote two other works, one of which survives only in fragmentary form and the other is no longer extant.⁴⁴

The Futuh al-Buldan is written in the hadith tradition, but occasionally adopts the style of the continuous narrative which became popular in the following century. It records the Muslim conquests of the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, and is arranged geographically rather than maintaining a strict chronological format.

⁴⁴ Al-Baladhuri, The Origins of the Islamic State, Columbia University Press, New York, 1916, p.7;

For the sake of clarity, I will attempt to render the Arabic or Persian names as clearly as possible into English, without the inflectionary notations and with as few patronymics as is possible. I will also attempt to regularize the references to various individuals. As an example: The Caliph al-Mansur (754-75) is known to Theophanes as Abd Allah; Tabari refers to him only rarely as al-Mansur (the name he chose when he became caliph), instead using 'Abu Ja'far' (and very rarely 'Abd Allah'). It should also be noted that 'b.' is the recognized abbreviation of ibn, (son of).

Abu Ja'far Muhammed Ibn Jarrir al-Tabari was born of a Persian family of considerable importance at Amul on the Caspian Sea in Tabaristan in 838. He had an interest in the hadith from an early age and moved to the town of Rayy to further his study. At age 30, Tabari settled in Baghdad to collect more hadith. From there he moved to Basra, then on to Wasit and then to Kufa. While in Kufa he is said to have learned over 100,000 hadith. He returned to Baghdad to continue his education in hadith, and to investigate the teachings of the various law schools. Later Tabari moved to Syria and then to Egypt in 867, where he studied local law. After returning to Baghdad in 870-71, Tabari became embroiled in a dispute with a powerful group of fanatical followers of Ahmad b. Hanbal (another man famous for his knowledge of hadith; d. 855). This escalated into a large-scale mob action on the part of the Hanbalites, which it took thousands of troops to quell. Tabari's life was made extremely difficult by the Hanbalites, who slandered him and kept scholars from seeking him out as a source of hadith. He went into hiding, and it was during this enforced seclusion that Tabari wrote. Eventually the furor died down and he was able to return to public life. His opinion was much sought as a jurist and hadithist. He died in Baghdad in 923.

Tabari wrote extensively in the field of the Tafsir or commentaries on the Quran. He also contributed Latif al-Qawl fi Ahkram Shara'i al Islam, a legal compendium based on the teachings of the school he founded. His historical work, Ta'rikh al-rusul wal-muluk ("The Book of Information on Prophets and

Kings') records the period from creation to his own time and was written in the tradition of the hadith which affected virtually every aspect of Tabari's life.⁴⁵

Ahmad b. Ishaq Al-Yaqubi, also known as Ibn Wahdih, contributed both a geography and a history which have survived. Al-Buldan is a geographical text which describes the state of the Caliphate and its neighbors in Yaqubi's own time (c. 900 A.D.).⁴⁶ His historical work, Al-Tarikh, has much to add to the data presented by the other Arab authorities, often preserving details available nowhere else.⁴⁷

Various other Muslim sources are of more limited utility for the present study. The anonymously authored Hudud al-Alam is an Arabic geography of Persian extraction dating to the tenth century. Minorsky suggests that it is the work of a "'cabinet scholar' and not a traveller."⁴⁸ Another geography, the Khitab al-Uyun ('The Book of Springs'), also contributes to an analysis of Byzantine-Arab military interaction. From an eleventh century Spanish

⁴⁵ Published as Tabari, Annales, ed. M. J. de Goeje, et. al. Leiden, 1879-1901, 13 vols. The English translation of the text is presented by: State University of New York Press in 38 Volumes with various translators and editors. Henceforth, these volumes will be cited by translator and page number. Another translation of the period 754-809 has been provided by J. A. Williams: al-Tabari, The Early Abbasid Caliphate, trans. J. A. Williams. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988. 2 vols.

⁴⁶ Al-Buldan, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1892. Translated as Les Pays, G. Wiet, Paris, 1937.

⁴⁷ Al-Tarikh, ed. M.T. Houtsma, Leiden, 1883. Al-Tarikh is available outside of Arabic only through Brooks in excerpted portions of the text. All of Brooks' references to Yaqubi (or, Ibn Wadhah, as Brooks calls him) are to Al-Tarikh. E.W. Brooks, "The Arabs in Asia Minor from Arabic Sources, 641-750", JHS, 18 (1898) 182-208.

⁴⁸ Minorsky dates the compilation of the text to 372 A.H. (982 A.D.), Hudud al-Alam, xiv.

manuscript, the text survives in only partial form. The extant portion of the Khitab al-Uyun begins in 705 A.D. and is, according to Brooks, the sole preservator of: ". . . several valuable works relating to the period."⁴⁹

From the above analysis, it is apparent that the addition of the Arabic sources is of inestimable value to any assessment of the reign of the Isaurian Emperors. It remains now to conduct such an assessment.

⁴⁹ Brooks, "Arabs in Asia Minor, 641-750," 182.

V

LEO III

Leo III assumed the imperial purple on 17 March 717, bringing to an end a rapid and violent succession of emperors which saw six different reigns in twenty-two years (695-717). It is necessary to discuss briefly the turbulent time prior to Leo's accession in order to understand fully his accomplishment.

Officially the Empire had been at peace with the Caliphate since the failure of the four year siege of Constantinople by the Arabs in 678. Circumstances forced the Caliph Muawiya to sue for peace in order to allow the armies of Islam to recover from the disaster. Muawiya's successor, Yazid (680-83), saw no reason to alter matters since much of his might was involved in putting down a revolt in the East. Upon Yazid's death, civil war erupted until Marwan established supremacy, passing the Caliphate on to his son, Abd al-Malik, when he died in 685.

Abd al-Malik promptly renewed the treaty with Byzantium under the original terms; he then set about healing the internal divisions of the Caliphate, suppressing a series of annual rebellions until 691-2. It was at this time that relations grew strained between the two realms. Abd al-Malik attempted to continue amicable relations with the Emperor Justinian II, the successor of Constantine IV. Theophanes attributes renewed hostilities to the foolishness of the new Emperor, but whatever the reason, the Empire and the Caliphate met

on the battlefield of Sebastopolis in 692-3. The outcome was a defeat for the Empire which in turn caused Sabbatios, the ruler of Armenia, to renounce imperial clientship and transfer his allegiance to Abd al-Malik in the following year (692-3). Theophanes concludes his entry for that year by saying: " From then on the Agarenes [the Arabs], growing bolder, ravaged Romania."⁵⁰

Theophanes records renewed annual raids into Byzantine territory beginning in 694-5. After Justinian's fall from power in 695-6, matters rapidly grew worse. Sergios, the Patrician of Lazika, revolted against the Empire and placed himself under Arab rule. In 697-8, after brief resistance, the Muslims conquered Byzantine Africa. That same year, Apsimar, the Drungarios of the Kibyraiote theme and commander of the expedition mounted to recover Africa, seized the Imperial throne from the ineffectual successor of Justinian, Leontios.

Under Apsimar, the Empire waged a partially successful campaign against the raids of the Arabs. Though he made no move toward the recovery of Africa, Apsimar placed Herakleios, a capable military man and brother to the Emperor, in command of the Caucasus border. Herakleios performed his duties competently, even managing to take the offensive in 700-1, and routing the invaders in 701-2 and 704-5. However, he was not able to stem the tide of raiders. Taranton (Tarandos) was captured and settled in 701-2. In 702-3, al-Massissa (Mopsuestia) in Cilicia was rebuilt, fortified and garrisoned. Al-

⁵⁰ Theophanes, 64.

Baladhuri notes: "The Muslims had never lived in this town before."⁵¹ In addition to these inroads, some time between 690 and 705 Kaisariyyah and Ascalon were also refortified by the Muslims.⁵²

Meanwhile events beyond the border were also beginning to go against the Empire. The region of Fourth Armenia went over to Arab rule in 702-3.⁵³ When the Armenians attempted to return to the Byzantine fold the next year, they were unsuccessful and brutally punished by their Arab masters. Thus, with the return to power of Justinian II, the Empire had lost the Armenians and Lazikians as allies in addition to surrendering four strategically important sites in the Caucasus.

Justinian's second reign did nothing to slow the rapidly worsening border situation. In 705-6, the Empire was invaded in force by the brothers Maslamah and Hisham b. Abd al-Malik. Tabari records Maslamah's destruction of a large Byzantine army at Susanah (Sision) near al-Massissa.⁵⁴ He went on, either in the same year or the next, to conquer Tuwanah (Tyana), while Hisham is said to have taken the unidentified fortresses of Buluk, al-

⁵¹ Baladhuri, 255.

⁵² According to Hitti, Kaisariyyah is Caesarea Mazaka; Baladhuri, 219. Ascalon may be Arkalla, which is only a few miles from Caesarea Mazaka.

⁵³ The term 'Fourth Armenia' is used by Theophanes to refer to that part of Armenia outside of the bounds of the Empire; Theophanes, 69. It does not appear that he is overly conscientious in such notation, occasionally simply using Armenia when he obviously refers to regions beyond Imperial control.

⁵⁴ Tabari, Hinds, 134.

Akhram, Bulus and Qumqum.⁵⁵ Baladhuri also records the fall of Tuwanah but under 707-8, While Theophanes places it in 709-10. For the present purposes the precise dates of the events are not as important as their sequence. On this Tabari is clear, The conquest of Tuwanah and the variously named citadels paved the way for a major invasion through Cilicia and deep into the hinterland of the Empire itself in the period immediately after the actions outlined above.⁵⁶

By the following year, these possessions were apparently well enough under control to allow Maslamah and al-Abbas b. al-Walid b. Abd al-Malik to lead forces into Cilicia, Isauria and beyond. Maslamah took Hiraklah (Herakleia) and continued into Isauria where Tabari states that he conquered the fortress of Suriyah (the citadel of Isaura or an unnamed fort within Isauria itself). Maslamah then headed for Ammuriyyah (Amorion) where he defeated

⁵⁵ Tabari, Hinds, 134; Hinds is obviously correct in his belief that there are chronological problems here. Tabari lists the conquest of Tuwanah under both 705-6 and 706-7. Under the latter entry Tabari gives the captured fortresses as Qustantin, al-Ghazala and al-Akhram; Tuwanah/Tyana is mentioned as the conquered city in both entries, but Buluk, Bulus and Qumqum are given only in the first. Qustantin is Constantine, north-west of Edessa. The rest defy identification and one or more may be alternate names for another in the group - Bulus and Buluk, for example. Qumqum may be the Byzantine fortress of Komacha-ani/Kamachon (generally known to the Arab sources as Kamkh), but the location does not fit the described events.

⁵⁶ For simplicity, Tabari's chronology and sequence of events will be accepted with reservation. Tabari's record is the most complete in addition to being the most confused. Interestingly enough, a similar chronological inconsistency may be found when comparing the entries for the siege of Constantinople in 716-18. Perhaps the sources which Theophanes, Tabari and the others had to deal with were so numerous and contradictory as to render dates essentially meaningless.

a large Byzantine force.⁵⁷

Al-Abbas is credited with the taking of al-Budandon (Podandos) and Adhruliyyah (Dorylaion). This could have been accomplished in one of two ways. He could easily have achieved both objectives travelling with Maslamah, who would have had to pass Podandos to get to Herakleia and was well on his way to Dorylaion when he defeated the Byzantines at Amorion. If Amorion withstood Maslamah, it would be quite plausible to leave a blockade around the city while another force continued on to assault Dorylaion. Al-Abbas met and routed another Byzantine army and took the city itself.

It is also possible that Al-Abbas set off north from Podandos while Maslamah headed west. Al-Abbas could then have taken Qammudiyyah (Kamouliana) and ventured on to Dorylaion and an expected rendezvous with Maslamah. According to Tabari, Maslamah was the commander to take Kamouliana, but it is possible that Tabari is misinformed on this point; also the two pronged attack conforms to a known Muslim raiding practice.⁵⁸ Alternatively, Maslamah could have taken Kamouliana on his return to Syria, heading east then south to avoid the difficulty of having to provision his troops off the same settlements which were dislocated or raided on the

⁵⁷ Tabari, Hinds, 146; it is not recorded whether Amorion fell.

⁵⁸ Al-Yaqubi provides no significant details for this year. But he records the use of the two-pronged attack on several later occasions. For 723-4 A.D. : "Abd-al-Rachman, the son of Solomon, the Khalbi, made a raid on the south in the summer; and Uthman, the son of Chayyan, the Murri, made a raid upon the north in the summer." (Brooks, "Arabs in Asia Minor, 641-750," 197-8. Similar entries appear for the years 726-7 and 729-30.

westward march.

In the decade which followed, the forces of Islam did not falter in their assault upon Byzantine territory. From 708-9 to the second siege of Constantinople (716-8) only one year did not see a significant Arab raid upon the Empire. In 710-11 Susanah (Sision) was abandoned by its imperial inhabitants who, says Tabari: "... migrated to the inner part of the Byzantine territory."⁵⁹ In the next year al-Abbas took Samastiyyah, Maslamah conquered Masah and three forts near Melitene, and Marwan b. al-Walid reached Khanjarah.⁶⁰ Widespread raiding and the fall of Antakiyah followed in 712-3.⁶¹ Hiraqlah fell for the second time a year later. The incessant raiding continued until the beginning of the second siege of Constantinople in 716.

According to Theophanes, as early as 686-7, many of the "... cities of the heights ..." were already in Arab possession.⁶² Theophanes' assessment

⁵⁹ Tabari, Hinds, 182.

⁶⁰ Samasteia is identified by Brooks ('The Arabs in Asia Minor', p.193n.) as Mistheia; but Hinds notes that Ibn al-Athir has Sabastiyya, which could be Byzantine Sebasteia, fifteen miles north-west of the Pass of Melitene; Hinds equates Khanjarah to Gangra and Masah to Amaseia; Tabari, Hinds, 184.

⁶¹ Theophanes tells us that this is Pisidian Antioch; his entry is in 714-5; Theophanes, Turtledove, 79.

⁶² By this phrase, Theophanes probably is referring to the walled citadel-towns overlooking the surrounding countryside. Many of these citadels were situated so as to control access to the mountain passes of the Caucasus. They were a part of the defensive system of the Empire against an incursion into Asia Minor. Caesarea Mazaka and Arkalla/Ascalon lay approximately 25 miles west on the route from the pass of Adata, for example. Mopsuestia controls the route to the Cilician Gates. These were the two most accessible passes and the ones most often used by the Muslims invading Asia Minor.

may have been premature for the late 680s, but it is evident that the Caucasus situation deteriorated greatly over the last years of the seventh century and the early ones of the eighth. By the second decade of the eighth century the Arabs did hold many of the 'cities of the heights'; so too did they control the access to the Caucasus passes. Thus the Muslim raiders were able to move virtually at will within imperial territory. By 716, the forces of Islam were operating well within the realm of the possible in their attempt to take Constantinople.

The sources which report on this momentous event are many, but the testimony, while reasonably consistent, is troublesome. The most detailed (and the most confusing) source is that of Theophanes. Nikephorus has little to add that is not in Theophanes' work. Nikephorus has either derived his own version from Theophanes, or both in turn drew independently from another source. He often describes events with identical details to Theophanes' own. While Nikephorus' work is less puzzling than Theophanes', this is only the case because Nikephorus does not include the difficult passages found in the Chronographia.⁶³ That Theophanes drew upon some source (to which Nikephorus may also, directly or indirectly, have had access) for the events of the siege is evident. Turtledove notes that, in describing the siege, Theophanes

⁶³ For this reason, it is possible to forego any further reference to Nikephorus' version of the siege of 716-8. For a discussion of the probability of common source material for Nikephorus and Theophanes, see Nikephorus, Short History, trans. C. Mango, 12-18;

refers to Leo III as: "... the pious Emperor ...".⁶⁴ This is, as Turtledove correctly points out, the sort of error that Theophanes could only have made had he been copying rather carelessly from what was probably a text of a date significantly closer to the events described and favourable to Leo III.

Theophanes' account of the siege provides a good basis for comparison with other sources which may be used to shed more light on the difficulties in the Chronographia.

For the year 715-16, Theophanes records that Maslamah attacked Constantinople, yet Maslamah did not succeed in doing so until the following year. While Constantinople must have been his objective, and Theophanes mentions that preparations had been made for that purpose, it becomes obvious that Leo, then strategos of the Anatolic theme, was instrumental in slowing the Muslim advance and delaying the Arab campaign.⁶⁵

The Arab force of 715-16 began the expedition by moving overland to Amorion. Suleiman wanted to place Leo on the throne of Byzantium and wrote to him to discuss terms.⁶⁶ The Arabs laid siege to Amorion and attempted to negotiate with Leo, but Leo dragged out the talks and escaped a

⁶⁴ Theophanes, trans, Turtledove, 88n; in addition, Leo is more favourably treated throughout the siege episode than in other passages. This further supports the possibility of a pro-Leo and probably iconoclastic text which has not survived.

⁶⁵ Theophanes, trans. Turtledove, 79-80; Theophanes' full account of the campaign is abstracted in the pages which follow and may be found on p. 82-90.

⁶⁶ At this time Leo was at odds with the Emperor Theodosius. Leo had supported Theodosius' predecessor Artemios. The situation was widely known, even Maslamah, "... had heard that the Emperor Theodosius hated his general [Leo]." Theophanes, 83.

trap set for him by Suleiman. Leo was so successful in his efforts that the siege of Amorion fell apart as the Arab tribesmen withdrew, complaining about laying a siege instead of raiding lightly-defended and more profitable places elsewhere.⁶⁷

With the enemy gone, Leo refortified Amorion, left men to garrison it and moved the non-combatants out. The main Muslim force, under Maslamah, appeared at Amorion just as Leo left for Pisidia. Leo continued the negotiations for an alliance with Maslamah, at the same time letting Maslamah know that Amorion had been reinforced and would not fall easily. Eventually, Leo could stall no longer but Maslamah was forced to move on in order to reprovision his force. He took his army to Akroinon and then captured Pergamon. But by then it was the end of the raiding season and Maslamah took his troops back beyond the Imperial border. Leo had effectively diverted the attack from the Capital.⁶⁸

Leo took advantage of Maslamah's retreat to travel to Nikomedeia, where he captured the Emperor Theodosius' son as well as the: "... entire

⁶⁷Theophanes, 83.

⁶⁸ The significance of the delay should not be underestimated. Theophanes tells us that Artemios sent emissaries to spy upon the Arabs' preparations and thus was aware of the coming invasion before the death of Al-Walid (late February 715, according to Tabari, Hinds, 218;). It is also recorded that Artemios used this knowledge to improve the defences of the Imperial City by expanding the fleet, rebuilding wall sections and constructing siege engines; Theophanes, 80. It may well be that Leo bought the Emperor crucial time to complete the refortifications. As it turned out, Maslamah did not begin the actual siege of Constantinople until 15 August 717, the year after his encounter with Leo at Amorion.

imperial retinue and the palace's leading figures."⁶⁹ Theodosius was convinced by these events to relinquish the throne. Leo's route to imperial power was clear.

Leo was proclaimed Emperor on 17 March 717, even as the Caliphate began its major campaign with renewed vigour. He again attempted to get Maslamah to confer with him, but the Arab general was rightly suspicious. Maslamah proceeded to encamp around the Imperial City and summoned Suleiman with the rest of the expedition. The siege began on 15 August 717 and lasted a full year. The landward sides of the city were blockaded by a ditch and rampart. Suleiman arrived on the first of September with 1800 ships full of supplies and troops. This huge armada was split to find harbour in the various ports along the Bosphorus near Constantinople where they could effectively seal the city from maritime contact. But unfavourable winds for the Muslim fleet allowed Leo to send out fire-ships against the vulnerable invaders and many of the Arab vessels were burned. Crucial provisions and men were lost and the besiegers could not afford to lose more ships in an attempt to block access to the city by sea.

Due to the damage done to the naval force and the loss of supplies incurred thereby, the Arabs faced a winter of hardship, famine and disease.

⁶⁹ Theophanes, 84. Although Theophanes does not say so, it is to be expected that there was an army with the Emperor's heir that Leo either defeated or suborned. It is unlikely that such a collection of personages would have been outside Constantinople on the main military route while a major invasion and an untamed strategos roamed the hinterland.

These conditions combined with uncommonly cold weather to kill many of the besiegers as the months wore on. Meanwhile since the Arab ships could not seal off the City, provisions could be brought in, and although it would not have been an easy time for Constantinopolitans, they had only to look beyond the walls to see true misery.⁷⁰

With spring came reinforcements and provisions brought by two fleets from Egypt. The ships were guarded closely and harboured secretly to avoid a disaster similar to that of the previous year. But the Egyptians of this new armada rebelled and gave the Emperor enough information that he was able once again to fire the Arab ships and carry away considerable plunder.

A land army had also been sent to the aid of Maslamah, but it was ambushed and dispersed on the road to Nikeia. To compound the entire disastrous venture the Bulgars attacked the besiegers and slaughtered a great number of them.⁷¹ The remainder withdrew and suffered further losses due to storms and other disasters until few returned to their homes.⁷²

Theophanes' tale of unending woe for the forces of the infidel is almost

⁷⁰ Theophanes, 80, relates that Artemios commanded that all who would stay within the City walls during the siege should have three years of provisions on hand. Thus there is little doubt that those inside the City were better off than the invaders.

⁷¹ 22,000 according to Theophanes, 90. A confusing passage in the Chronography of Gregory Abu Faraj may suggest that the Bulgarians were hired by Leo to attack the Muslims before the City, Abu Faraj, 108. Ostrogorsky certainly believes that Leo was the instigator of the Bulgarian attack, History of the Byzantine State, 139.

⁷² Theophanes states that God's wrath turned the sea to fire about the fleeing raiders. While this can hardly be accepted as such, the message to be derived from the entire description of the siege is one of unmitigated disaster for the invaders.

too horrific to be believed. When combined with the references to God's justice and the intervention of the Virgin to save the City, it is apparent that the version of events that Theophanes has preserved is, to an unknown but probably considerable extent, legendary. The details concerning Leo are equally troublesome. Leo fools two able Arab generals with rather transparent stalls and stratagems which test the credulity of the reader.⁷³

Yet the story of Leo's trickery is repeated in a series of hadith preserved by Tabari. Tabari's version of events is not without its difficulties but it is as credible as that of Theophanes. Leo initiated negotiations upon the entry of the Islamic force into the Empire. His intent was simply to bribe the army to leave Byzantine territory, a long-standing stratagem among the Romans. Leo's offer of one dinar per soldier was refused and the talks end with no further trickery. Then Leo convinced Maslamah that, in order to intimidate the citizens into surrender, he should destroy the provender of the besieging army. This would serve to demonstrate the intent of the army to storm the walls rather than settle down to a lengthy siege. Maslamah followed this highly dubious council and so began the famine mentioned in all sources concerning the siege.

⁷³ As an example, during the negotiations with Suleiman, Leo reportedly came into the camp of the enemy with only an escort of three hundred men. He was let free but knew that the Caliph wanted to capture him. After sending ten times the number of Leo's own force to surround him, the Chronographia has Leo escape by feigning that he is going hunting, and instead shifting his camp. When accosted by his pursuers he is allowed simply to go on his way. Theophanes, 82-3.

An alternate version of the event from the same source has Leo offering to deliver the Empire to Suleiman and then tricking Maslamah into allowing the besieged citizens an opportunity to gather food outside the city proper. In this way, Leo suggested to Maslamah: ". . . the people would believe that Leo's word and Maslamah's were one and that they were safe from being captured."⁷⁴ Once the citizens were provisioned, Leo: ". . . began to act in a hostile manner, having deceived Maslamah by means of a trick that would shame even a woman."⁷⁵ This in some way led to the famine and the dire consequences suffered by the besiegers.

Obviously neither Theophanes nor Tabari relate a version of the story which satisfies the suspicions of the modern reader. The ruses recorded in either source could hardly have succeeded as they are presented; yet, it would appear that there is a tradition, common to both Byzantine and Arabic historiography, that Maslamah was clearly duped by the future Emperor, Leo III.⁷⁶

Further corroboration of this supposition is available from the

⁷⁴ Tabari, Powers, 41.

⁷⁵ ibid.

⁷⁶ As Gero points out, The anonymous Arabic Khitab al Uyun, an eleventh century Spanish text, probably based upon much earlier eastern sources, also preserves the theme of Leo's deception of Maslamah, as well as his utter scorn for the Muslim commander; Gero, Byzantine Iconoclasm in the Time of Leo III, 33n.

Also worthy of note is Gero's mention of the favourable treatment of Leo in the Armenian source material; material which would have been outside the iconophile revisionism of the post-iconoclastic period, Gero, Leo III, 37.

Chronography of Gregory Abu Faraj. Gregory records a similar story to those of Theophanes and Tabari, but with enough differences in detail to suggest that it did not draw upon either as a source. In Gregory's work, Leo promised to open the kingdom of Rhomaye to Maslamah in exchange for the throne. With such backing Leo felt powerful enough to attack the Emperor Theodosius at Amorion and take him prisoner. From there Leo went to Constantinople and: " . . . he explained to them that by means of treachery he had turned back the Arabs. And they were very pleased with him and they made him king over them."⁷⁷ Maslamah then appeared before the city, but was soon in dire straits, caught between the forces of the city before him and Bulgar mercenaries. Famine added to the host of Arab troubles and when the army eventually retreated they were further hounded by Imperial forces.

Gregory's version is in many ways the most satisfying of all the sources. But perhaps the most sensible conclusion is in some amalgam of all the information available. In any event, the exact details of the situation are not of paramount importance in an appreciation of Leo's role in the siege. Most significant is the common idea that is consistent in Theophanes, Tabari and Abu Faraj: that Leo in some way outmanoeuvred and delayed the superior forces of the armies of Islam, outsmarted their commanders, and by doing so placed himself in control of the Byzantine Empire.

In the events of the siege, regardless of how the details are interpreted,

⁷⁷ Gregory Abu Faraj, 108.

Leo demonstrated a shrewd ability to combine the use of martial power with negotiation and misdirection to further his goals. His application of military force was precisely timed to take advantage of weaknesses within the enemy camp - weaknesses often created by Leo himself. This precision also extended to the use of mercenaries and allies. Leo was well aware of the benefits of having an outside agency fight his battles for him. As Emperor, Leo III continued to pursue the same policies after the siege of Constantinople - fighting only when necessary or advantageous and ideally convincing others to bear the brunt of enemy attack. Leo was not a latter day Herakleios and his reign is not a story of unending attack and counter-attack. Rather it is one of alliances of mutual support, of subtle influence exerted upon peoples who had similar interests and problems to those of Byzantium.

The reign of Leo III did signal the beginning of a new military relationship with the Caliphate and without this change the Emperor's policy of indirect action would probably have been ultimately unsuccessful. As Haldon and Kennedy have noted:

From the 680s to the end of the siege of Constantinople in 717/8 - except for a short period between 680-693, when the Caliphate was hindered by internal troubles, Byzantine forces were stretched to the point of collapse, or so it would appear from the accounts of both Muslim and Byzantine historians.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ J.F. Haldon, H. Kennedy, "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organization and Society in the Borderlands," Zbornik Radova Vizantinoloskog Instituta, 19 (1980) 82.

After the siege the situation was changed. Through a combination of carefully applied military pressure and the nurturing of alliances with peoples with a common cause, Leo was able to fortify the Empire and pave the way for its eventual rejuvenation.

The first signs of the changing relationship between Empire and Caliphate came with the accession of Umar II to the position of Commander of the Faithful. With his direction in 718 that the siege of Constantinople be called off Umar adopted a new and more cautious policy concerning the Byzantine situation. But his change in attitude was not due solely to the status of the siege itself. Rather it was his concern over repeated attacks made along the frontier by the Byzantines. With this in mind, Ibn al-Athir relates that Umar ordered Turandah (Taranton) abandoned in 718-9: ". . . and he [Umar] ordered them [the Turandans] to return to Malatyah and left Turandah unoccupied, through fear of injury to the Moslems from the enemy."⁷⁹ Umar seems to have felt that the border-towns were too exposed to attack, for he also considered pulling his garrison out and abandoning al-Massissa (Mopsuestia). Baladhuri notes:

⁷⁹ Ibn al-Athir, in Brooks, *IHS*, 18 (1898) 197. Baladhuri adds that Umar had Turandah destroyed; p.290.

[Umar] wanted to destroy the town together with the forts that lay between it and Antioch saying 'I hate to see the Greeks besieging its people.' When he, however, learned that the town was built to check the Greek advance on Antioch, and that, in case it were destroyed, nothing would remain to stop the enemy from taking Antioch, he desisted ...⁸⁰

Apparently Leo launched an attack into the region shortly after the siege of Constantinople. The above passages suggest that al-Massissa was assaulted and Turandah at least was threatened.⁸¹ Baladhuri also provides an account of another Byzantine attack, this time upon Syrian Laodikeia:

In the year 100 [718-9] . . . the Greeks made a descent by sea on the coast of al-Ladhikiyah. They destroyed the city and took its inhabitants prisoner. Umar ordered that it be rebuilt and fortified and asked the Greek 'tyrant' to accept ransom for the Moslem prisoners.⁸²

When taken together, these events tell of a significant and apparently highly successful offensive launched by Leo immediately upon the conclusion of the siege of Constantinople. Obviously Leo was aware of the vulnerability of the Arabs and took advantage of it by assaulting one or more strategically

⁸⁰ Baladhuri, 255.

⁸¹ They could have been targets of a single campaign, either land or sea-based. It seems more likely that a two pronged attack was made - with one force moving through the Cilician Gates and the other through the pass of Adata.

⁸² Baladhuri, 204; he also notes that Yazid II (720-24) increased the size of the garrison. Yaqubi confirms the attack but states that it occurred while: ". . . the Moslems were smitten by scarcity, and hunger, and cold . . ." before the gates of Constantinople; Brooks, *IHS*, 18 (1898) 195.

important border-towns shortly after a maritime attack upon a city of the Caliphate. Umar thought the situation desperate enough to pay tribute to the Byzantines in order to ransom the prisoners and presumably to bribe against continued attack. That first Umar and then Yazid saw the necessity of refortifying and regarrisoning along the vulnerable frontier and sea-coast is a further measure of a change in the long established *status quo* of Byzantine military inadequacy.

Under Yazid II (720-4) the Caliphate was able to recover somewhat from the debacle of the siege of Constantinople. Summer campaigns were organised once more and Muslim victories again began to occur. After no summer raids in 719-20, a reasonably successful campaign was launched the next year - resulting in the defeat of a Byzantine field force in Fourth Armenia and the taking of a city.⁸³ For the year following, Yaqubi mentions that al-Abbas led a raid into imperial territory only to have his command destroyed piecemeal as it separated to raid and forage. Another branch of the campaign under different commanders besieged and took an unnamed fortress.⁸⁴ For 722-3, a

⁸³ Ibn al-Athir has Dalisa which Brooks suggests might be Dalisandos, *IHS*, 18 (1898) 197. For 721-2, Tabari records the same commander taking Raslah, which Powers identifies tentatively as Larissa; Tabari, Powers, 167. Powers also notes that another Arab chronicler, al-Azdi, gives the city as Awasa, 167n. The *Khitab al-Uyun* records the fall of Muwasa for the year 723-4, Brooks, *IHS*, 18, (1898) 198. Since none of the authorities mentions the fall of more than one city, it is not unlikely that Dalisa, Raslah, Awasa and Muwasa all refer to the same place. It is also possible, given the rather convoluted chronology of these entries, that Dalisa and Raslah refer to the events of one year while Awasa and Muwasa correspond to the actions of the next.

⁸⁴ Yaqubi, Brooks, *IHS*, 18 (1898) 197.

minor incursion was made but no details are provided.

In 723-4, a Muslim army was again caught after having separated into smaller detachments.⁸⁵ At least one major detachment was lost to Byzantine attack. However, another prong of the campaign succeeded in capturing Khamkh and Kuniya.⁸⁶ Theophanes' entry for the year contradicts those of the Muslim authorities. The newly installed Caliph Hisham is said to have led an attack but apparently: "... he withdrew after squandering many of his men."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Tabari, Powers, 192.

⁸⁶ Yaqubi, Brooks, *IHS*, 18 (1898) 198; Brooks identifies Khamkh as Kamachos [Khamacha-ani] and Kuniya as Ikonion. It seems somewhat unlikely that no other source would have any record of the fall of so significant a city as Ikonion. It is also worthy of note that Kamacha-ani and Ikonion are not at all adjacent, yet they are recorded as having been captured by the same force. If Khamkh is correctly identified as Kamachos/Kamacha-ani, Ikonion would not have been an easy additional target for the same army. Brooks may well be mistaken in this regard, and Kuniya may correspond to some other site more closely situated to Kamachos than Ikonion. Three possible places exist: Ramsay locates a fortress by the name of Koron in eastern Cappadokia; this probably corresponds to the major Byzantine military centre of Kolonia; again, a rather unlikely prospect for an otherwise unrecorded raid. More probable is Khorne a fortress just east of Malatyah/Melitene.

Concerning Khamkh itself, Baladhuri relates that it changed hands continually over the period under review and was in Byzantine hands until Maslamah retook it (presumably in 723-4). Sometime after this it passed once more to the Byzantines but was taken again by the Muslims in 767; Baladhuri, 289.

⁸⁷ Theophanes, 95. This entry is unusual in that, by omission, it places Leo in a better light than would have been the case had Theophanes given more detail. It is unlike Theophanes to allow to pass any opportunity of recounting to the full extent the woes of Leo's reign. The fall of Ikonion, had Theophanes known of it would have been a tempting item for the monk. If, in fact, Ikonion did fall, then Theophanes' sources for this year were scant indeed.

Obviously the different accounts present some difficulty. Theophanes is probably referring to the same raid as Tabari, but Yaqubi appears to relate an entirely separate incident. Thus it is possible that the traditional two-pronged attack was launched by the Muslims with one army heading north from Malatyah to attack Khamacha-ani while the other entered Byzantine territory through the Cilician gates and proceeded to Ikonion.⁸⁸ Ikonion may or may not have fallen and one of the two prongs dispersed into looting parties only to be eradicated upon doing so.⁸⁹

Whether or not Ikonion was attacked, it is clear from the following entry that the Arabs derived no strategic advantage from the year's activities which carried over to the next season. For 724-5, Tabari records a raid of little significance. Yaqubi has more detail, stating that the Muslims razed some crops and villages in retaliation for the Byzantine destruction of enemy pasture lands.⁹⁰ This year's events suggest that the situation was in something of a stalemate with each side carrying on raids of a very local and limited nature. Yaqubi records a similarly unspectacular raid for the following year.

Beginning in 726-7, the raids against the Empire became more significant and extensive, and at first glance appear to herald a return to the devastating

⁸⁸ Malatyah/Melitene was a staging ground for the annual Muslim raids.

⁸⁹ If this is indeed how events occurred then it makes the most sense to assume that the Cilician arm of the campaign proceeded to the environs of Ikonion and, perhaps blockading the city, set about pillaging only to be caught by the Byzantine response.

⁹⁰ Tabari, *Blankinship*, 8; Yaqubi, Brooks, *JHS*, 18 (1898) 198.

attacks of the Cilician campaign just prior to Leo's accession. Tabari, Theophanes and the Khitab al-Uyun all tell of the fall of Caesarea to Maslamah, the leader of the ill-fated siege of Constantinople.⁹¹ According to Theophanes, this attack was roughly coincidental with two other assaults. Hisham's son, Muawiya, reportedly took his command: ". . . here and there and withdrew."⁹² However, Theophanes contradicts himself shortly thereafter, recounting Muawiya's siege of Bythinian Nikaia:

At around the summer solstice of the tenth Indiction (after the victory of Leo's partisans) a body of Saracens attacked Bythinian Nikaia. It had two emirs: Amr went ahead with 15,000 light armed troops to surround the unprepared city, while Muawiya followed with another 85,000. Even after a long siege and the partial destruction of the walls, they could not enter Nikaia's sacred precinct of the honoured and holy fathers because of its inhabitants' prayers . . . the images of the fathers were set up there . . . After the Arabs accumulated a large body of prisoners and booty, they withdrew. God reveals this to the impious: not because of his piety did Leo prevail . . . The city of the holy fathers beat back the

⁹¹ Tabari, Blankinship, 27, and Theophanes, 96, place the capture in 726-7. Khitab al-Uyun, rooks, IHS, 18 (1898) 198, has 725-6. A major attack upon Caesarea does not lend support to the likelihood of the fall of Ikonion two years earlier; rather it argues against it. If Ikonion had fallen it would have provided an advantageous staging point for further penetration of Byzantine territory. Thus Muslim raiding in subsequent seasons should have concentrated in the region of Ikonion itself.

Incidentally, Abu Faraj records not Caesarea but Neo-Caesarea, however he is alone in this regard, 109. The Khitab al-Uyun locates Kaisariyya between Malatyah and Khamkh, Brooks, IHS 18 (1898) 198. While this locale does not exactly describe either Caesarea or Neo-Caesarea it is more applicable to the latter.

⁹² Theophanes, 96.

Arabs might by the images in it (which most definitely were in it) and by their intercession.⁹³

Nikephorus' Breviarium also mentions the Nikaia attack (under the year 727-8) but does not give so negative an impression as Theophanes:

... a numerous force of Saracen cavalry again overran the Roman state. Led by the Saracens Ameros and Mauias, they came against the chief city of Bythinia, namely Nikaia. After besieging it for some time, they finally departed without having accomplished anything.⁹⁴

In these two passages it would appear that Theophanes and Nikephorus are drawing from the same source. The details and structure are alike, but Theophanes has obviously filled out his account with some polemical prose referring to Leo's issue of the edict against icons (726 A.D.).⁹⁵ Otherwise there is little to distinguish between the two records other than the somewhat suspect additional details provided by Theophanes relating the depredations upon the Nikaiaans.

⁹³ Theophanes, 98. Apparently Theophanes is relying upon more than one source for this entry, and copying rather sloppily from them. First Theophanes relates Muawiya's uneventful raid, then he give details which make it obvious that Muawiya's raid was anything but uneventful.

⁹⁴ Nikephorus, Mango, c.61, p.131; Mango provides information which may corroborate a less pessimistic version of the siege of Nikaia. An inscription dating to the time of Leo III commemorates the failure of the Arab attack, p.212., citing A.M. Shnieder and W. Karnapp, Die Stadtmanor von Iznik (Nicaea), (Berlin, 1948) 49, no.29 and pl.50.

It should also be noted that the Muslim authorities either had no knowledge of the attack on Nikaia or did not think it worthy of mention; see Nikephorus, Breviarium, Mango, 212.

⁹⁵ See M.V. Anastos' arguments in Cambridge Medieval History, 4, part 1 (second edition, Cambridge, England, 1966).

Gregory Abu Faraj provides information which also suggests that this year saw a major campaign. Abu Faraj records the siege of Nikaia [albeit under the year 731] as being immediately after the capture of Gangra in northern Cappadokia. Yaqubi confirms the fall of Khangara in the year 727-8, which places it very near in time to the Nikaia campaign as dated by Theophanes or Nikephorus.⁹⁶ Thus a reconstructed season would have a force from Malatyah and possibly Khamkh moving down the Byzantine military road into the Imperial hinterland to strike at Nikaia after taking Gangra.⁹⁷ If this hypothetical reconstruction represented actual events then this season was without a doubt the most devastating for the Byzantines since the accession of Leo III.

Yet as overwhelming as this assault may appear, it is significantly less disastrous than were the Cilician campaigns of the years prior to the siege of Constantinople. Nikaia withstood the attack (rather well, if Nikephorus is to be believed), and Caesarea, Kuniya and Gangra were sacked but not held.⁹⁸ The only actual loss was the citadel of Khamkh/Khamacha-ani and this fortress

⁹⁶ Abu Faraj, 110. Yaqubi, Brooks, *JHS*, 18 (1898) 199.

⁹⁷ It is not unreasonable to assume that Khamkh was at this time in the hands of the Caliphate. Interestingly, Neo-Caesarea is also directly on this route and seems to fit the probable campaign scheme well. However it is as likely that Caesarea was taken by a different force under Maslamah while the main force travelled down the northern military road under Muawiya.

⁹⁸ Whatever the identity of Kuniya there is nothing to suggest that it remained in Muslim hands.

would remain hotly contested by the Empire and Caliphate for some time to come.

The Nikaia campaign should not be viewed as an imperial failure, but instead as indicative of the stiffening of the defences of the Byzantine frontier. It must be noted that both Theophanes and Nikephorus stress the awesome size of the Muslim force involved in the campaign.⁹⁹ That the Caliphate could raise an army several times greater than could the Empire is to be expected. Yet the Muslims lost men in the field time and again, thus the Byzantine response was more than simply to shelter behind fortifications. Leo III or the strategos on the scene was able to organise a sort of guerilla resistance even to such a massive assault.

In the following season (728-9) the attacks appear to have been more

⁹⁹ It is quite easy to imagine an expedition of the scope of the siege of Constantinople in 717-8. For that army the actual numbers are unknown, but the naval contingent alone is said to have involved a total of 2460 ships - and this comprised only the supplies and reinforcements for the main army which travelled overland and was itself also reinforced by that route (Theophanes, 88-89). If the estimate of 100,000 men is taken as an accurate assessment of the army's strength, the army could well have outnumbered the entirety of the Byzantine military. While the actual numbers need not be taken literally, it is apparent that the Byzantine writers were impressed by the size of the force involved in the Nikaia campaign. Obviously, Theophanes and Nikephorus (or their common source) intended that the size of the invading force be perceived as overwhelming. Treadgold notes that the largest Byzantine field force recorded in the eighth century was 20,000 men, W. Treadgold, Byzantine State Finances in the Eighth and Ninth Century, East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, 92.

J. Haldon, on the basis of the testimony of Ibn Khurradabih's geography, Kitab al-Masalik wa'l Mamalik, estimates the Byzantine Tagmata (the regular army stationed at the capital) to number no more than 8,000 in the eighth century; "Kudamah Ibn Djafar and the Garrison of Constantinople," Byzantion, 48 (1978) 80. Yaqubi states that for his own time the thematic army contained only 40,000 cavalry, Les Pays, ch.323.

limited in scope.¹⁰⁰ Land and sea raids resulted in the capture of a fortress, but the Muslims again lost men to a Byzantine counter-attack.¹⁰¹ The next year saw the fall of Samaluh to Muawiya, and more sea raids.¹⁰² Another series of raids in 729-30 was uneventful, though Tabari reports one unit: ". . . even reaching Qaysariyyah."¹⁰³ In 730-1 Kharshanah was captured and Farandiyyah burned.¹⁰⁴

In either this year or the next, the Byzantines again inflicted a significant defeat upon the invaders. Tabari's account is the most informative: "Abd al-Wahhab b. Bukht went out campaigning with al-Battal in the year 113 [731-2], but al-Battal's forces were defeated and fell back."¹⁰⁵ In addition to this defeat, the commander Muawiya was somehow convinced not to enter Imperial

¹⁰⁰ See Haldon and Kennedy, "Arab-Byzantine Frontier," 115, who point out the enormous expense involved in mounting an expedition of such a scale as the Nikaia campaign.

¹⁰¹ Tabari, *Blankinship*, 33; the fortress called Tibah by Tabari, may be Thebasa, 15 Miles northwest of Herakleia. For 728-9, the *Khitab al-Uyun* records the same details of the raid but the name of the fort is lost to a *lacuna*. Yaqubi refers only to the fall of Gangra, which is in all likelihood a part of the push to Nikaia, Brooks, *IHS* 18 (1898) 199. Theophanes records the city as Ateous, which is unidentified but may be synonymous with Tibah/Thebasa, Theophanes, 98.

¹⁰² Tabari, *Blankinship*, 45. *Blankinship* places Samaluh near Tarsus and Al-Massissa, but he equates it to Semalous on the northern military road between Kharsianon and Dorylaeon. Obviously they cannot be the same. If Semalous is not meant, it would mean that the Byzantines still held a town in Muslim controlled Cilicia.

¹⁰³ Caesarea in Cappadokia, Tabari, *Blankinship*, 64. Apparently it was still an accomplishment to venture even into eastern Cappadokia at this time.

¹⁰⁴ Theophanes gives the commander as Maslamah, but Maslamah was at war in the Transcaucasus according to Tabari, *Blankinship*, 70. Kharshanah is Kharsianon, Farandiyyah is unidentified.

¹⁰⁵ Tabari, *Blankinship*, 95. The *Khitab al-Uyun* dates the event to the previous year, Brooks, *IHS* 18 (1898) 200.

territory with his force this year, but remained instead at Marash.¹⁰⁶ It would appear that the Byzantine presence in the border region at this time was strong enough to defeat one raiding force and intimidate another into inaction.¹⁰⁷

The year 732-3 saw al-Battal reach as far as Agrun/Akroinon, inflicting a defeat upon a Byzantine army and capturing a general Constantine in the process. Muawiya is said to have taken the outer city of Akroinon itself. Another raid that year reached as far as Caesarea but is not said to have accomplished anything.¹⁰⁸

For the next four years little is recorded by either the Byzantine or the Muslim authorities. A campaign was made each year but only Theophanes provides any more detail. For 734-5 Theophanes says merely that: "Muawiya

¹⁰⁶ Tabari, Blankinship, 95. Yaqubi records the same information to 730-1, stating that Muawiya: "... did not succeed in entering their [the Romans'] territory." Brooks, *IHS* 18 (1898) 200.

¹⁰⁷ If the alternate chronology of Yaqubi and the *Khitab al-Uyun* is favoured, then Muawiya was able to pin the Byzantine defensive force without exposing his command to risk. Had Muawiya's army not been there the Byzantines might have been able to relieve the siege of Karsianon after defeating al-Battal.

¹⁰⁸ Tabari, Blankinship, 97. There is no reason to suspect that this *strategos* Constantine was the future Emperor Constantine V (718-775). Theophanes confirms a raid into Paphlagonia, 101. Yaqubi places the defeat of *strategos* Constantine in 733-4, as does the *Khitab al-Uyun*, Brooks, *IHS* 18 (1898) 200. The *Khitab al-Uyun* does not mention a Constantine but records events as disastrous for the Byzantines: "... The Romans were routed and the Moslems fell upon them and made great slaughter, and took many captives and took possession of the camp and made sport of their property." Brooks, *IHS* 18 (1898) 201. The *Khitab al-Uyun* is suspect, however, because it has merged this conflict with the battle at Akroinon in 739-40.

Concerning Caesarea, Tabari may well be repeating his entry for the previous year.

devastated Asia."¹⁰⁹ Other than the occurrence of raids, no source has any more detail for the period 735-6 to 737-8. For the last year, Theophanes states that Sulieman took many prisoners in Romania.¹¹⁰ The first detailed reference by another source is for the year 738-9, when Maslamah raided the Empire once more, conquering Matamir.¹¹¹

In 739-40, Hisham launched a major invasion which penetrated well into the Empire.¹¹² This time, however, events did not favor the armies of the Caliphate. Al-Battal, with 20,000 cavalry, camped near Akroinon. according to Theophanes, almost two-thirds of that number were subdued, including the commanders. The other forces were successful in their raids but are not recorded as having accomplished more than looting.¹¹³ The surviving 6800 of Al-Battal's cavalry escaped to Sulieman and then to Syria. While the destruction of

¹⁰⁹ Theophanes, 102. As may be seen, Theophanes is not always reliable, and caution must be exercised when no corroboration is available elsewhere.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, 102; 'Romania' is the Empire.

¹¹¹ Matamir is identified by Hillenbrand as a complex of caves in Cappadokia; Tabari, Hillenbrand, 3. Maslamah had been off fighting the Khazars and other 'Turks' to the east of Byzantine territory for the last decade (see below).

Yaqubi states that Maslamah reached Malatyah - if this is true then he did not actually enter imperial territory, Brooks, *IHS* 18 (1898) 201.

¹¹² Theophanes gives the size of the force at 90,000 men in three distinct armies, 103. This makes this attack a similarly scaled enterprise to the army of the Nikaia campaign of 727 or 728.

¹¹³ Theophanes, 103. The Muslim authorities have less detail but mention specifically that al-Battal was slain. The *Khitab al-Uyun* notes that Al-Battal's force was caught by surprise from the rear. But here the *Khitab al-Uyun* must be regarded with suspicion; see n.108.

one-sixth of the Muslim army may not seem crippling, it is unlikely that all the looting that Sulieman perpetrated would compensate for the loss of equipment and investment represented by the slaughtered thousands. Indeed, the next year Yaqubi is the only authority which records any action in Byzantine lands, and it appears to have been minor.

Thus the campaigns of Leo III's reign, while not a story of uninterrupted imperial success, demonstrate that the forces of Islam were no longer able to raid Byzantine possessions with impunity. By analyzing the various references to Byzantine and Arab field action it is possible to advance certain hypotheses concerning imperial military ability.

With the exception of the offensive launched immediately after the failure of the siege of Constantinople, there is no record of any Byzantine attacks upon Arab possessions prior to 740-1. While it is possible that instances of Byzantine aggression went unrecorded, there is no reason to believe that any such events occurred after Umar II and Yazid II took measures to refortify the border. From this it may be concluded that, by Umar's death (20 February, 720), the Muslim defences had recovered and sufficient men were once again under arms to deter Byzantine attack.

After the accession of Umar's successor, Yazid II, the Byzantine strategy changed. No longer choosing to raid outside their own borders, imperial forces were frequently responsible for significant losses inflicted on raiders upon

entering Byzantine territory. The standard ploy used was of hitting various detachments after the raiding force had dispersed to loot and/or forage. A tenth century treatise on skirmishing, written at the direction of the Emperor Nikephorus II Phokas (963-9), deals specifically with established techniques used to combat Arab raids:

When the troops going out to raid have gotten far enough away from the emir's battle formation so they cannot retreat to it again or so they will not even be aware of an attack upon the formation, since each man will be rushing to get to the villages and gather as much booty as possible, then the general should set his own battle line in proper order and launch his attack against that of the emir, now undermanned, and with the aid of God he will be victorious and bring about the complete and utter destruction of the enemy. If he does not feel confident enough to attack the battle line directly, in as much as he notices that it is very strong, significantly stronger than his own, then he should move off at a distance to the side by a good, but secret, road and with due speed reach the enemy soldiers who are dispersed about. During the whole day he should charge in upon them and fight them, as they are all scattered all around . . .¹¹⁴

The actions of Leo's armies adhere very closely to the principles set down in the Manual of Nikephorus II's time. Clearly Leo was able to assemble a competent

¹¹⁴ G. Dennis, Three Byzantine Military Treatises, Dunbarton Oaks Texts no.9, Washington, D.C. 1985, 171-3. There are other variations listed to deal with other situations.

Another treatise on strategy, which Dennis dates to the sixth century, recounts similar tactics in use by Belisarius to defeat greater numbers in detail. It adds that Belisarius advocated the destruction of provisions on the enemy's route of march in order to facilitate the need to send out supply parties; Dennis, Three Byzantine Military Treatises, 105. A reference to this tactic may exist in Tabari for the year 724-5.

but not overly large force in time to attack the raiding detachments of the Arabs as they attempted to loot the Byzantine hinterland. On only rare occasions was Leo able to accomplish the destruction of a large contingent of the enemy army (i.e. the two defeats of al-Battal, in 731-2 and again in 739-40).¹¹⁵ To succeed against a major Arab incursion Leo would have had to employ not only the Tagmata, but probably a significant proportion of the thematic units as well.¹¹⁶ The assembly of sufficient forces to engage in such action would have taken some time. It is significant that two major engagements were fought at Akroinon. An Arab march so far into Paphlagonia would have allowed Leo much more time to gather troops than would an Arab attack upon eastern Cappadokia.¹¹⁷ Thus the great campaigns of the Arabs were in a way much more vulnerable than the comparatively minor border raids, which would probably have been countered primarily by the local part-time thematic troops.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Strictly speaking, al-Battal's 20,000 cavalry comprised a detachment of the entire force of almost five times that number. However, al-Battal was obviously operating independently at Akroinon, while the rest of the army was at Tyana. Additionally the size of the force would probably make it roughly equal in size and possibly bigger than the Byzantine response.

¹¹⁶ It is acknowledged that the thematic 'system' as it is known in the later period was in only its formative stages in the eighth century.

¹¹⁷ According to Ramsay, there was apparently little danger of Akroinon falling to anything short of an extended siege. It was a heavily fortified structure situated on a natural basalt pinnacle which overlooked the countryside from an elevation of 900 feet. W. Ramsay, The Historical Geography of Asia Minor, Royal Geographical Society, Supplementary Press, v. IV, London, John Murray, 1890, 87.

The smaller scale local raids were also vulnerable to carefully timed attacks, however. From 720-1 and the probable reestablishment of a viable Arabic frontier defence to the second battle of Akroinon in 739-40, four years saw the destruction of at least one Arab detachment. To this can be added the major defeats suffered by Muslim raiding armies (al-Battal's reverses in 730-1 and 739-40) and the losses incurred during the siege of Nikaia. Further, Hisham is recorded as: ". . . squandering many of his men . . ." in Romania in 724-5.¹¹⁹ Finally, on one occasion in 731-2, a Muslim force was assembled at the border and did not even venture into Byzantine territory.¹²⁰ This would have cost the Caliphate nearly as much as an unsuccessful campaign within the Empire.

When all the events are examined together it may be seen that the period from 720 to 740 was a difficult one for the raiding armies of Islam, especially as compared to the years prior to the siege of Constantinople. If the brief phase of Byzantine aggression from 718 to 720 is included, it becomes apparent that only a cautious commander could hope to invade Romania successfully and without

¹¹⁸ Concerning the attack on Nikaia as an example. It is difficult to imagine Leo not having taken any action to relieve the city. Nikaia is less than 100 miles from the capital so Leo could have had the Tagmata and possibly the Thracian thematic army there in less than a week. The forces of Artavasdos are recorded by Theophanes as having been within Nikaia. Thus the city was being defended by its own complement as well as the soldiers of the Anatolic theme. The Chronicon ad 1234, 241-43, states that the siege lasted forty days without the city's fall, so it was apparently well defended; Nikephorus, Mango, c.61, p.212, for Mango's comments and the reference to Chronicon ad 1234. Abu Faraj also has forty days for the siege but states that the Arabs destroyed the city, 110.

¹¹⁹ Theophanes, 95.

¹²⁰ Tabari, Blankinship, 96; Yaqubi has the date as 730-1, Brooks, JHS 18 (1898) 200.

loss. During Leo's reign three towns were taken from the Caliphate and at least six significant losses were inflicted upon Arab armies.

But it would be easy to overstate the case of Byzantine military resurgence. Against these setbacks the Caliphs could point out that their armies succeeded in taking at least ten named towns and three unnamed fortresses and had defeated two Byzantine field armies. In addition, while the Nikaia campaign was undoubtedly a costly one for both sides, the losses of the attackers may have been offset to some degree by what Theophanes calls the: ". . . large body of prisoners and booty," they carried away.¹²¹ The first battle of Akroinon also resulted in the fall of the outer city to the besiegers and may have provided some loot as well.¹²²

The analysis of Leo's military action demonstrates that throughout his reign the Emperor followed several principles regarding the Arab raids. After 720 he became aware that the Empire could engage the Caliphate in only a 'limited' war if it were to entertain any hope of success. Even at full strength the thematic forces could not prevent the loss of border-citadels if the Muslims launched a significant attack. But they could harass the raiders whenever possible, picking off detachments or entire armies if the situation allowed.

¹²¹ Theophanes, 98. Although Nikephorus' less alarmist comments on the siege should not be forgotten; Mango, 131.

¹²² Tabari, Blankinship, 97.

Destroying raiding detachments had a number of benefits for the Empire. Most obvious is the military advantage of reducing the opponents' numbers, but there are others. When the chance of being ambushed existed the number of raiding parties would almost certainly be lower in order to increase the strength of each party. Larger units move more slowly and are more easily seen and avoided by refugees. Lessening the effectiveness of the provisioning forces would rapidly affect the main army, forcing commanders to bring a larger, more vulnerable supply train or to dedicate troops to guarding the line of supply. Otherwise the raid would inevitably be cut short as provisions dwindled and were not sufficiently replaced.

The knowledge that an enemy force was nearby and preying upon the looting parties would necessitate a change in the invaders' strategy. Looting parties might be reassigned to scouting in order to locate the defenders. Until the enemy was located or at least its size ascertained, only a rash commander would allow his looters to range so far afield as to be unable to rush to the aid of the parent body. The actual quantity of troops assigned to raiding would probably also be reduced so that a sudden attack would not find the invading army low in man-power.

Haldon and Kennedy have adequately described the Arab-Byzantine frontier as a land full of Byzantine fortresses in the mountainous parts of the

territory and walled Arab towns in the valleys.¹²³ Most of the Byzantine citadels were also local military and administrative centres, often with an attached village or town. The town was unfortified but the inhabitants looked for safety in the castle itself, which was relatively safe from assault. Thus, with warning, much of the population and its movable wealth would be ensconced in the fortress for the duration of an Arab army's stay in the region. The Byzantine military system on the border was developed to minimize the damage done by Muslim invaders. In the case of raids too great to fend off, either wholly or in detail, the unit was able to retreat with much of the population of the region into a mountain citadel and let the raiders loot what remained. While the effectiveness of this system of defence should not be overstated, it is entirely likely that many of the cities listed as captured by the various authorities for the period suffered damage primarily to their unfortified portions, while the walled portions, probably the richest holdings, went unscathed.¹²⁴

Concerning the vulnerability of any rural Byzantines in the borderlands, it must be remembered that the experience of almost annual raids was not new to the area.¹²⁵ Haldon notes that even before the Arab raids into eastern

¹²³ For an illuminating description of life on both sides of the frontier, see Haldon and Kennedy, "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," *passim*.

¹²⁴ The instances of Nikaia (727-8) and Akroinon (732-3) are indicative of this possibility. In both cases only the outer portions were breached.

¹²⁵ J.F. Haldon, Byzantium in the Seventh Century, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1990, 48.

Anatolia, the region had been thoroughly disrupted by the Persians of Herakleios' time (610-41). Thus the situation as it existed on the border in Leo III's day had already obtained for nearly a century. Far from being disruptive unusual events, by the early eighth century the Arab raids had probably become a part of the local equilibrium. By the 720s and later the lifestyle of eastern Asia Minor would either have adapted to the annual incursions or ceased to exist; potentially, the strengthening of Byzantine resistance under Leo could have meant increased security for those peoples living on the border.

That the raiders were probably not getting rich from the spoils of the annual forays is borne out by the records of Muslim pay-scales for the soldiers of the various regions. Haldon points out that the rates of pay are much greater than those recorded for Islamic soldiers elsewhere.¹²⁶ It is important also to note that this same high pay-rate suggests that the government of the Caliphate could not recruit enough men-at-arms for the region using normal methods. In all likelihood this must be either because the duty was more hazardous or because the rewards of plundering were insufficient.

Obviously, the reign of Leo III was one filled with military action along its eastern border. As has been seen, the Empire was able adequately to defend

¹²⁶ For the Abbassid period, Haldon and Kennedy suggest: "It can definitely be said that rates of pay [on the frontier] were substantially higher than the 80 dirhams per month which was usual elsewhere, which suggests that conditions were arduous and there was a need to offer men inducements to serve in the area. "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier," 112.

itself due to a policy of ambush and counter-raid when dealing with invaders. But if these actions had been used in isolation, they undoubtedly would have met with much reduced success. In reality, Leo combined his military solution with a diplomatic one in true Byzantine fashion. By influencing various peoples around the Empire to act in concert with him he was able effectively to lessen the amount of pressure that the Caliphate could bring to bear upon the Empire. It is this indirect Arab-Byzantine conflict which must now be examined. The negotiations which Leo pursued with certain Transcaucasian peoples contrived advantageous alliances for Byzantium, in turn making a military resurgence a real possibility for his successor.

A significant presence had been established by the Byzantines in the Transcaucasus as early as the reign of Justinian I. For the peoples immediately to the north of Arab-controlled Armenia the Empire was ever-present. Byzantine fortresses controlled the Black Sea coast, their churches graced local settlements, and their influence was present in the imperial titles sported by the local nobility.¹²⁷

The Arabs certainly understood the need to exert influence in this region. During Leo's career, virtually every year expeditions were launched by the Arabs against different tribes of the Caucasus and Black Sea area with an eye

¹²⁷ W.E.D. Allen, History of the Georgian People, Routledge and Keegan Paul, London, 1971, 80; see also S. Der Nersessian, Armenia and the Byzantine Empire, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1947, 7.

toward control of this strategically valuable territory. Allen states:

In the Transcaucasian lands the Arabs held the cities at the junction of the traders' ways: Tiflis - Shamakha - Derbend; Kars - Dabil, Barda'a to Tabriz. By their control of the Armenian cities they were the masters of Armenian politics, but otherwise they let alone the mountain lords, using them as military auxiliaries, deposing them or killing them as fitted policy, beating down the older, prouder houses, setting one versus the other, favouring small and upstart men.¹²⁸

Long before Leo became Emperor, he was made aware both of the advantages of alliance and of the importance of the various peoples beyond the eastern border of the Empire. Theophanes records an early adventure of Leo's during the second reign of Justinian II (705-11). At this time Leo became intimately acquainted with both the Alans and the Abasgians. Indeed, if Theophanes has the details of the story correct Leo left a lasting positive impression upon the Alans and reaffirmed their alliance with the Empire. In addition, he was able to press the ruler of the fortress of Sideron, as well as the leader of the Apsilians into a clientship with Constantinople. The Abasgians were also convinced to return to the imperial fold after suffering devastation at the hands of the Alans, who were acting on the behalf of Leo.¹²⁹ Thus Leo shored up the faltering Transcaucasian situation, but it was not to last. By 711,

¹²⁸ *ibid*, 80.

¹²⁹ See Map for the geographical setting of the Caucasus region.

the Prince of Abasgia as well as Smbat, ruler of Armenia were once more within the orbit of the Caliphate. Regardless of the outcome of this instance however, Leo seems clearly to have understood the necessity of good relations and influence peddling in the diverse courts of the Transcaucasus.

The references to Leo's diplomatic efforts as emperor are rare and generally are not found in the major sources for the period. This may be due, as Gero suggests, to iconophile historical revisionism which may have overlooked the recording of events charitable to Leo in favour of polemic over his iconoclasm.¹³⁰ It is necessary to seek out references in the Armenian records for a clearer picture of this crucial part of Leo's foreign policy.

As has been seen, by the beginning of the eighth century, the Caliphate was master of Greater Armenia.¹³¹ A line of Arab border-fortresses also was in existence to ward against Byzantine attack. Continuing the *limes* which included Marash/Germanikeia, Hisn Mansur, Zapetrah, and Malatyah/Melitene, the Muslims fortified Mayyafaraquin, Malazgird, and Qaliqala.¹³² This frontier limited the Empire's ability to take direct action in Fourth Armenia, but diplomatic interference was not impossible.

Through the Pontic Sea, Byzantium had access to the Abasgians and the lesser west Georgian peoples. Allen notes that until the end of the eighth

¹³⁰ Gero, Leo III, 152.

¹³¹ S. Der Nnessian, Armenia and the Empire, Harvard University Press, 1947, 7.

¹³² Martyropolis, Manzikert and Erzerum respectively; Minorsky, Hudud al-Alam, 395.

century, Byzantine control over the Abasgians was reasonably secure.¹³³ Gero provides evidence to corroborate this assertion. A letter which Gero says refers to events no later than 736 (the prince Mir addressed in the letter died in 736) congratulates the princes Mir and Arcil for their staunch defence against the attacks of the Caliph's forces. The preface to the letter adequately demonstrates the level of clientship of the princes to the empire:

Mir, Arcil and Leo, the Ruler of Aphazeti, sent an embassy to the king of the Greeks and revealed what had been done by God through their [i.e. the Muslims'] instrumentality. And he gave two crowns and a charter to Mir and Arcil, and accompanying these [gifts] he wrote thus: Yours were dominion, courage, and wisdom in Kartli. Now although you are persecuted, together with us for the sake of service for the Cross, when we return, as God promised to us, you will be exalted with us.¹³⁴

The text would appear to preserve an appeal by Mir and Arcil to the Emperor Leo for salvation from Arab aggression. Leo rewards them with the symbols of their clientship and makes vague promises of aid. Nothing is known which

¹³³ Allen, *Hist. of the Georgian Peoples*, 80. C. Toumanoff, "Medieval Georgian Historical Literature," *Traditio* I (1943) 144, states that the Bagratids, a Georgian dynasty, were honoured with the imperial title *curopalates* by the eighth century.

¹³⁴ Gero, *Iconoclasm During the Reign of Leo III*, 151. Gero also notes: "The section of the chronicle which includes this text is considered by several scholars (including Toumanoff) to be the work of Juansher, Arcil's relative by marriage, and thus an almost contemporary eighth century source. C. Toumanoff, "Medieval Georgian Historical Literature," *Traditio* I (1943) 170. The possibility of eleventh century interpolations does, however, exist, *ibid.*"150. The fact that Juansher was closely related to Mir might also mean that he had access to documents such as the letters, etc; Kartli may be Kars; see Map.

directly relates to any military salvation for the princes, though perhaps the record of the Byzantine defeat in Armenia in 720-1 refers to the Emperor's response to the Abasgian lords.¹³⁵

It has already been seen that, in the early years of the eighth century, the Alans were favorably disposed toward the Empire, in part due to the efforts of Leo. However, by 724-5 the Alans were incorporated, at least temporarily, as a client-state of the Caliphate. Al-Hajjaj b. Abd al-Malik succeeded in a campaign against them and imposed the jizyah upon them.¹³⁶ Yet by 735-6, Tabari relates that the future Caliph Marwan captured three fortresses in Alan lands.¹³⁷ Apparently the Alans had shifted away from Muslim control at some point over the intervening ten years. No source gives the exact reason for this shift, but one need not look far.

Arab aggression in the Transcaucasus was more than enough reason to make the Alans attempt to throw off their Arab yoke before it became impossible. Several campaigns in the recent past saw Islamic forces conquering the lesser tribes of the region. As early as the reign of Yazid II (720-4), The

¹³⁵ Tabari, Powers, 164; Yaqubi, Brooks, IHS 18 (1898) 197. Gero also notes that another letter to Leo, Ruler of Aphazeti, is preserved by the chronicle. He says that the text is obviously false, 151. Yet the correspondence itself need not be doubted, only the substance of it.

¹³⁶ Jizyah is the tax or tribute imposed by the Muslims upon non-believers under their control, Tabari, Blankinship, 8. A year earlier, al-Hajjaj was able to pass through Alania and progress as far as Balanjar in Khazaria. So apparently the Alan position toward the Caliphate was not overly hostile even then.

¹³⁷ Tabari, Blankinship, 111.

Hasmadan, a people of the Lakz (Lazikians) were brought under Arab domination. In 729-30, al-Jarrah crossed the Kur and the Samur rivers into Khazaria, but on the way he took Hamzin, Ghumik and Shakki, all near neighbors of the Alans.¹³⁸ The next year al-Jarrah and most of his command were slain by the Khazars on his return to Ardabil. But shortly thereafter another expedition under Maslamah (then governor of Armenia) sought the Khazars and conquered Khaizan, al-Jibal, Sharwan, Liran, Tabarsaran, Filan, Jarshan, and Muskat. He then besieged and took the city of Al-Bab and settled it with 24,000 Syrians.¹³⁹ Tabari records Marwan defeating the Tumanshah once more in 735-6 during the attack on the three Alan forts.¹⁴⁰

A significant pacification of the Alans must have occurred at this time. Two years later in 737-8, Tabari relates that Sulayman b. Hisham captured Sindirah, while Ishaq b. Muslim al-Uqayli again seized the lands of the Tumanshah. Meanwhile Marwan is said to have pressed even further and carried the war into Khazar territory.¹⁴¹ In the next season Marwan led another

¹³⁸ Baladhuri, 323. Minorsky, History of Sharvan and Darband, identifies Hamzin as the Humri, and the Ghumik as the Tuman of Baladhuri. Hamzin may be identical to the Hazmadan also mentioned by Baladhuri, 322; see Map.

¹³⁹ This passage is corroborated by Masudi, Trans. Sprenger, 435-6, who although he obviously had Baladhuri as a source, has details which must have come from elsewhere. The Khaizan may be Khazai, just south of the Samur. Al-Jibal, Liran and Jarshan are unidentified; see Map.

¹⁴⁰ Tabari, Blankinship, 111.

¹⁴¹ Tabari, Blankinship, 167. Blankinship identifies Sindirah with the Sideroun mentioned by Theophanes for the same year (p.103) but states that the site cannot be identified further. Sideroun is also mentioned by Theophanes during Leo's

campaign into the same region and beyond to the country of the Lord of the Golden Throne:

Marwan captured his fortresses and laid waste his lands. He submitted to Marwan, having agreed to give him as jizyah one thousand slaves. Marwan took a pledge from him on that basis and reinstated him in control of his territory.¹⁴²

Obviously the Caliphate was slowly establishing a significant presence in the region. Yet there were definite limits to its power. While it was apparently possible to traverse Alania to raid beyond, Marwan was aware that there was no way in which he could retain direct control over the Sarir. A powerful permanent Arab presence was simply too far away to establish the Sarir as any sort of a client state. Marwan had to settle for a simple demand for tribute; anything more could easily be repudiated once the invaders retreated. Similarly, a jizyah was required of the Alans, but there was no way to retain local authority until the capture of al-Bab in 729-30.

Transcaucasian mission prior to his assumption of the purple (p.87). Minorsky, History of Sharvan and Darband, describes a people called the Shandan/Sindan, 103. Their location matches with the details which may be gleaned from Theophanes; see Map. Theophanes' reference for 737-8 mistakenly places Sideroun within Romania. In the context of the earlier passage, Sideroun is obviously east of the Lazikians (Arabic. al-Lakz).

¹⁴² Tabari, Hillenbrand, 3-4. The lord of the Golden Throne or Sahib Sarir ad-dhahab (Ar.) is the Khan of the remnants of the Avars who settled just north of the Alans after the dissolution of the Avar Kingdom in the second half of the seventh century. Known as the Sarir (Ar. 'throne'), they are described in the account of Ibn Rustah, who visited the Sarir prior to 902 A.D.. Ibn Rustah, Les Atours, Trans. G. Wiet, from Minorsky, History of Sharvan and Darband, 167-8.

Even this powerful citadel may not have been enough to secure the area entirely. Baladhuri noted that 24,000 Syrians were stationed at al-Bab, presumably to hold this strategically vital site.¹⁴³ However, Masudi records that the Alans could muster 30,000 horsemen and the Khazars are noted by al-Balami and Ibn al-Athir as having assembled that same number for a single expedition.¹⁴⁴ Thus the Syrian garrison could not hope to enforce Arab authority without aid from Damascus. For Byzantium, however, the result is the same: Alania slipped further from imperial influence even as the Caliphate established itself in the Transcaucasus.

Leo's best known diplomatic manoeuvre is the imperial alliance with the Khazars. In the early 730s, Leo acquired a Khazar princess to wed to his son Constantine, thus cementing a relationship which probably was in *de facto* existence for some time previous.¹⁴⁵ The Khazars had been at war intermittently with the Caliphate for nearly a century and from 717 onward Arab-Khazar strife was only slightly less common than the near annual Muslim raids upon the

¹⁴³ Baladhuri, 325.

¹⁴⁴ It is not intended that these figures be taken as actual values, but they are certainly indicative of the various authorities' opinions of the relative strengths of the different forces in the region. In this regard the figures demonstrate that the 24,000 Syrians were probably intended to act primarily as a defensive force for the citadel. Masudi, trans. Sprenger, 436; for al-Balami and Ibn al-Athir see Dunlop, History of the Jewish Khazars, 62.

¹⁴⁵ In 732-3 according to Theophanes, 101; Abu Faraj has 731, p.110; Gero notes that while Michael the Syrian has 731, the Chronicon ad 1234 puts the marriage in 730, Iconoclasm in the Reign of Leo III, 28-9.

There is no record of the terms of the treaty. It may have been one of mutual nonaggression or of financial aid to the Khazars.

Empire. By the early 730s, the Khazars would almost certainly have been sympathetic to Leo's cause and an alliance would have been mutually advantageous.

Various sources provide evidence which, when taken together, suggests a possible joint offensive upon Muslim Armenia by both Khazars and Byzantines.¹⁴⁶ Both Tabari and Yaqubi record a battle in Armenia in 720-1, in which the Arabs defeated a Byzantine force and took 700 prisoners.¹⁴⁷ But for the same year, Dunlop notes that al-Balami and Ibn al-Athir relate a major battle between the Khazars and the Caliphate, also in Armenia, which resulted in a punishing loss for the Muslims.¹⁴⁸ No further evidence exists for any joint action by the Empire and the Khazars, but relations were apparently peaceful until the official alliance several years later.

¹⁴⁶ The entries in the various sources are extremely confusing chronologically, and no adequate analysis of the Arab Transcaucasian campaigns has been done. In addition to the chronological difficulties the sources often use the same name to refer to what are apparently different peoples or different names to refer to a single group. It is not the intent of the present work to explore this complex problem except as it bears upon the central issue of Byzantine-Arab frontier warfare in this period.

¹⁴⁷ Tabari, Powers, 164; Yaqubi, Brooks, IHS 18 (1898) 197.

¹⁴⁸ Dunlop, History of the Jewish Khazars, 62. It is not impossible that Leo and the Khagan of the Khazars agreed to a co-ordinated invasion of Muslim Armenia. The timing coincides with the completion of Umar's reinforcement of Cilicia against Byzantine attack. Perhaps Leo saw an opportunity for further exploits in a new theatre of operations. At any rate, it appears that the venture was a failure for the Byzantines. This setback may have been instrumental in the formation of Leo's defensive policy of ambushing invaders (which was adopted at this time). Conversely, it may be simply that Leo was attempting to seduce one of the local Armenian potentates away from their Arab masters.

The Khaganate was definitely capable of occupying a significant portion of the Caliphate's resources during the two decades of Arab-Khazar warfare under discussion (717-37). The Khazars inflicted heavy losses upon the Caliph's armies in 717-8, 720-1 and 729-30. On several other occasions Arab forces are noted attacking Khazar possessions in strength. While this was without doubt punishing to the Khazars, it meant that there were considerably fewer troops for the Caliph to devote to attacks upon the Empire.¹⁴⁹

Whatever the exact terms of the Byzantine-Khazar union, it appears that Leo had gotten the better of the bargain. In fact, Leo could accurately be accused of leaving his allies to face the aggressions of the Caliphate unaided. There is some evidence to suggest that he had treated the Abasgians at Karthli similarly at some time in the past. To the embassy of Mir and Ardacil, Leo replied:

. . . stay in your fortresses, until three hundred years pass away, because in the two hundred and fiftieth year their dominion will be divided, and at the completion of the three hundredth year the power shall be given back to our kingdom, and we shall destroy the Agarenes.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ The Arabs made raids upon the Khazars in 723-4, 728-9, and 730-1. It should be noted that, had these forces been available to the Caliphate for use against the Empire, it would have been an easy logistical matter to transport them to the imperial border rather than to the region of al-Bab (the Caspian Gates). This could have made the consequences of the annual raids much more dire for the Empire. The Arab-Khazar wars are as much a boon to the Empire as the Abbasid revolution and its attendant distractions would be two decades later.

¹⁵⁰ Gero, Iconoclasm in the Reign of Leo III, 151.

The general impression of the passage is that Leo will aid them with little more than words and crowns. This attitude may have been hard on his allies, but if Leo saw the Empire's military situation as desperate, then he essentially was forced to choose between protecting his own possessions or those of his neighbours.¹⁵¹ Leo did not have sufficient men or money to launch campaigns into Armenia and beyond unless the reward was great.¹⁵² By not taking action in aid of his allies, Leo was saved the expense of such a course and was able to keep more of his troops at home to defend his own lands.

Throughout his reign, Leo III faced the potential of overwhelming military force being directed at his beleaguered Empire. After the siege of Constantinople, Leo was able to organize a brief but successful offensive against the Caliphate. But he soon came to understand that the Empire could not withstand prolonged, large-scale devastation of its territories by the armies of Islam and altered his military policy to limit the damage inflicted in this regard. This policy was so successful that he was able to inflict several losses upon the invaders and limit their depredations primarily to the frontier region. To further limit the forces the enemy could bring against the Empire, Leo sought out alliances with others who stood in the way of Arab attack. By creating such alliances he was able to split the attention of the caliphs and force them to

¹⁵¹ Since there is no way of knowing Leo's actual motivation, it is also possible that he had no intention of ever coming to the aid of any ally unless it suited him.

¹⁵² If he had already lost an army on one such attempt in 720-1, he would have been doubly cautious about any such risked thereafter.

commit men and resources to actions other than those which targeted the Byzantines. There were no territorial gains for the Empire during Leo's reign. Nor did the Caliphate suffer any major immediate consequence of their setbacks at Leo's hands. The worth of Leo's policy was not in that which it accomplished as much as it was in that which it prevented and that for which it provided. Through careful application of martial power and negotiation, Leo preserved the Empire and reestablished the Arab-Byzantine frontier. It took many years for the realization of this policy, but it eventually allowed for a further resurgence of Byzantine military fortune under Leo's son and successor, Constantine V.¹⁵³ Constantine was able to take the rejuvenated Empire of his father and, capitalizing on events around him even as Leo had before him, take the border struggle to the Caliphate.

¹⁵³ It is worth bearing in mind that the last actual dynastic succession was over half a century before when Justinian II succeeded his father Constantine IV in 685-6. From the deposition of Justinian in 695-6, the imperial office became the province of whomever could find sufficient backing in the military to take it. Leo himself seized power in just this manner. With the accession of Constantine V came the reestablishment of imperial succession and the stability which this sometimes entails.

VI

CONSTANTINE V

After a period of successful co-rule which lasted for some time, Constantine V succeeded his father Leo the Isaurian on 18 June 741. Only nine days into his reign, Constantine took his army into the Opsikion theme to battle the Arabs at Krasos. The outcome of the encounter is unknown, for neither Byzantine nor Arab sources provide any greater detail.¹⁵⁴ For the same year Baladhuri records an unsuccessful Byzantine attack upon Malatyah. The besiegers withdrew when word of a Muslim relief force reached the city.¹⁵⁵

These events herald a modification by Constantine of his father's essentially defensive policy. The assault on Malatyah is the first recorded instance of Byzantine territorial aggression since Leo III's campaign against Cilicia and Syrian Laodikeia in 718-20. However, unlike Leo's short-lived offensive, Constantine's scheme was to become a central point in his policy for the Arab border. It was no longer necessary for the Byzantines simply to await the Saracen inroads, attempting to minimize the damage caused to imperial territory by the invaders. Under Constantine, it became possible for

¹⁵⁴ Theophanes, 105. Yaqubi records a summer raid for 741 under Solomon, but has nothing more; Yaqubi, Brooks, JHS (1898) 202. At this time, it can only be assumed that the raid resulted in significant advantage for neither side; perhaps the invaders escaped with some plunder.

¹⁵⁵ Baladhuri, 291.

the Empire to take the offensive as it had not been under his father - making raids into Arab lands and looting Arab towns, just as the forces of the Caliphate had been doing to the Empire for over a century.¹⁵⁶

But this new policy could not be more fully enacted until Constantine was firmly established on the throne. In 742, Artavasdos, strategos of the Opsikion and lifelong supporter of Leo III, rebelled against Constantine and had himself proclaimed emperor. The civil war which followed lasted until the late fall of 743 and occupied much of the attention of both contestants for its duration.¹⁵⁷

The Arabs took advantage of the internicine struggle to raid the Empire. According to Theophanes: "When the Arabs learned of the civil war between these men they took many prisoners in Romania, Suleiman was their general."¹⁵⁸ Tabari confirms Theophanes testimony but adds that Leo III, at the head of a Byzantine army, opposed the raiders. Suleiman is said to have returned with booty.¹⁵⁹ Further raids were launched throughout the

¹⁵⁶

It is significant that Constantine is recorded as having been active in Opsikion concurrently with the Byzantine attack on Malatyah (an attack which comprised 20,000 men, according to Baladhuri, 291). The ability to involve the Tagmata and certain thematic troops in one region and to have enough thematic forces left to imperil a heavily defended enemy fortification was beyond the armies of Leo's era.

¹⁵⁷ Theophanes records the details of the civil war, 105-8. It will be dealt with here only in so much as it relates to the central question of Isaurian military policy on the eastern frontier.

¹⁵⁸ Theophanes, 106.

¹⁵⁹ Tabari, Hillenbrand, 68. Yaqubi also preserves this tale but adds that Artavasdas was beside Leo and that there was no engagement before the Arabs withdrew;

remainder of the civil war, until late 743 when Constantine prevailed over Artavasdas. Yet it may be worth noting that only Theophanes credits the raids of this period with significant consequences. The Muslim sources are united in recording simply the occurrence of a raid and its leader. The impression to be gathered from the Arab authorities is that the raids were not major. Overall, it would appear that, even when divided against itself, the Byzantine military was able to offer effective resistance against aggression.¹⁶⁰ While this statement can only be made tentatively, it is borne out by the rapid reestablishment of a major Byzantine offensive upon the cessation of the civil war. Even after the losses which must have occurred at that time, the imperial army was capable of immediate action.¹⁶¹

The change in the character of imperial policy was apparent to the Caliph Hisham (724-43). At some point during his reign he fortified a large

Yaqubi, Brooks (1900) 202.

Obviously these entries present a dilemma since Leo died the previous year. Perhaps Tabari and Yaqubi have preserved evidence of a Byzantine response but inserted the name of the wrong Emperor. Alternately, the dating of one or more of the entries may be inaccurate. It is curious that Yaqubi specifically notes that the Emperor and Artavasdas appear to resist the invasion jointly.

¹⁶⁰ It should be noted that the Muslim sources do not record severe internal difficulties for the Caliphate until 743 and the death of Hisham. Thus there were no divisions within the Muslim world to distract the sources or the raiding forces which they record.

¹⁶¹ There is no mention of Byzantine opposition to the Arabs for 742-3. However, if the thesis previously advanced concerning the comparative unassailability of many of the Byzantine citadels is correct, the Arab raiders would have needed considerable force to affect any Byzantine population centre. Thus even when unopposed, the invaders would often be limited to light raiding rather than conquest.

number of sites against potential Byzantine attack. According to Baladhuri:

Hisham also had Katargash fort built by Abd al Aziz b. Harijan al-Antaki. He also had Murah fort built because the Greeks had interfered with one of his messengers at Darb al-Lukan near al-Akabah-l-Barda. In this fort he stationed forty men and a body of al-Jarajimah. In Bagras [Pagrae] he established a garrison of fifty men and built a fort for it. Hisham, moreover, built the Buka fort in the province of Antioch.¹⁶²

Baladhuri gives no indication of when during Hisham's time the fortifications were carried out. If the period of fortification did not span the length of Hisham's reign, and was enacted over a relatively short period, the most logical time would have been in his last few years. As has been seen above, while Leo's armies were definitely troublesome to Muslim raiders, they posed little or no threat to the territories of the Caliphate. However, in the later years of the reign of Leo, his successor, Constantine, was of an age to take an active role in the exercise of imperial power. Indeed, the young emperor must have been active in the military prior to his accession to have achieved the early successes that even Theophanes credits him with. If, as is probable, Constantine displayed the same aggressive style as junior emperor that he did upon taking the throne, there was ample reason for an astute caliph to begin a fortification program on the Byzantine border. Thus, the defences were most

¹⁶² Baladhuri, 258; Baladhuri also records the construction of another fort, al-Muttakkab, in Hisham's time, p.258.

Bagras/Pagrae, also known as Birjirik is inland of Antioch. Katargash may be Karsaga. Murah, Buka and al-Muttakkab are thus far unidentified.

likely to have been undertaken in the late 730s or after, possibly as a reaction to the major loss at Akroinon in 739.¹⁶³ It is even possible that Hisham used the Byzantine civil war to take defensive action as well as to launch offensive raids.

With the defeat of Artavasdas, Constantine was able to concentrate more fully upon the eastern border situation. He lost no time in seizing the offensive. In 744, taking advantage of the revolt of Marwan b. Muhammad and the Arab civil war which followed the death of Walid II (reigned 15 April 744 to 12 October 744), Constantine launched a major assault upon al-Hadath and Zibatrah.¹⁶⁴ Both towns were razed but no attempt was made to establish a permanent Byzantine presence in either locale.¹⁶⁵

In the following year, Constantine again saw an opportunity during the

¹⁶³ Other than the abortive siege of Malatyah in 740-1, no overt action took place in the part of Constantine's reign (741-775) that overlapped Hisham's (724-43) which stands out as an obvious impetus toward such defensive measures. The loss of so large a force as the one destroyed at Akroinon could have had far-reaching implications for the Arab military. As was noted above, it took several years for the Caliph's forces to recover from the spectacular losses incurred in the siege of Constantinople (716-8).

¹⁶⁴ Adata and Zopetrah respectively; Baladhuri, 299. Ibn al-Athir records the fall of Zibatrah under the previous year, but Baladhuri specifically states that it was attacked in the days of Walid; Brooks, (1900) 202.

Marwan b. Muhammad is the future Caliph Marwan II (744-50) who championed the offspring of the murdered Walid II as a means to acquire the Caliphate for himself. This is the same Marwan who was so active against the Transcaucasian peoples throughout the middle decades of the century.

¹⁶⁵ Baladhuri, 299; and Ibn al-Athir, Brooks, (1900) 202. Both note that Zibatrah was rather weakly rebuilt by the Arabs and once more reduced by the Empire during Marwan's Caliphate. Baladhuri goes on to remark that this pattern continues for Zibatrah into the days of al-Mamun (813-33).

revolt of the city of Hims against the new Caliph, Marwan II.¹⁶⁶ According to Baladhuri, imperial armies fell upon the city of Marash and took it on terms after a siege. Again the city was destroyed rather than being garrisoned.¹⁶⁷ Theophanes records the same raid but adds that the Byzantines continued into Syria and seized Doulukia in addition to Marash.¹⁶⁸ There is no record of any further Byzantine aggression during the remainder of Marwan's reign. However, in 746-7 an Arab fleet of 1000 ships attacked Cyprus.¹⁶⁹ The Kibyrraiot navy was at anchor in Cyprus at the time and, taking advantage of the opportunity, was able to surround the Muslim armada and cut it off from retreat. Apparently, only a few ships escaped.

Given the persistent attacks suffered by the Caliphate at Byzantine hands in the early part of Marwan's reign, it is not surprising that he was responsible for significant fortification along the common border. He furthered the stiffening of the Taurus frontier begun by Hisham, rebuilding Marash as

¹⁶⁶ Hims/Emesa was in revolt for several months beginning in June of 745. See Baladhuri, 294-5, and Tabari, Williams, 4-9.

¹⁶⁷ Baladhuri, 294-5. Marash/Germanikeia was the birthplace of Leo III and the strategos Artavasdas. Theophanes also records that Constantine transferred some of his relatives from Marash to the capital at this time. The city was rebuilt by Marwan in 747-8; Tabari, Williams, 121; but it was again sacked by the Empire and once more rebuilt in the days of al-Mansur (754-775).

¹⁶⁸ Theophanes, 112. Doulukia is Duluk in Syria; whether it was garrisoned rather than destroyed is not recorded but the latter is much more likely. See also Nikephorus, Mango, c.67, p.139, who puts the event in 747-8.

¹⁶⁹ Theophanes, 113. Cyprus was at this time a condominium between the Empire and the Caliphate. In 742-3, Hisham had sent a force there to compel the inhabitants to choose either Arab or Byzantine suzerainty; Tabari, Hillenbrand, 120.

well as increasing the defences of Hisn Mansur. In addition to upgrading the fortifications there, Baladhuri notes that Hisn Mansur became the station for: " . . . a large host of the troops from Syria and Mesopotamia in order to repulse the enemy."¹⁷⁰

Toward the end of 749, Marwan's troubled Caliphate gave way under the pressure of the Abbasids. Marwan fled but was murdered in Egypt. Certain relatives succeeded in reaching Muslim Spain, but Umayyad power was no more and the Abbasids established themselves in the Caliphate under Abu-l-Abbas as-Saffah in 750.

The new Caliph was as aware of the troublesome Byzantines as had been his predecessor. According to Baladhuri, Abu-l-Abbas increased the garrison of al-Massissa by 400 men and further secured their loyalty by distributing lands among them.¹⁷¹ His concern was not misplaced, for Constantine demonstrated the necessity of Arab refortification that same year. The Byzantine Emperor mounted a major expedition against Malatyah and many of the citadels thereabouts. First threatening Kamkh, Constantine easily routed a unit of 800 horsemen sent as reinforcements by the governor of Malatyah. Constantine then invested Malatyah and, following a seige, the citizens were allowed to emigrate unmolested to Mesopotamia. The city: " . . . was then razed to the ground by the Greeks, who left nothing but a granary of which

¹⁷⁰ Baladhuri, 299.

¹⁷¹ ibid, 257.

one side was damaged."¹⁷²

From Malatyah, the Byzantine attack continued, taking Hisn Kalidiyah and Kalikala, laying seige unsuccessfully to Shimshat, and reportedly placing a garrison in the citadel of Karnak.¹⁷³ The response of the Caliphate was a raid by Said b. Abdallah, which appears to have had no significant consequences.¹⁷⁴

From the end of the Malatyah campaign until the accession of Mansur (9/10 June 754) there is no record of any border strife between Empire and Caliphate. Yaqubi states that Salih b. Ali's raid into Byzantine territory in 754-5 was the first since 742-3.¹⁷⁵ Tabari holds that the leader of this year's expedition was Abdalah b. Ali, but that the army did not succeed in

¹⁷² *ibid.*, 291. He also suggests that Constantine knew that no aid would be forthcoming to defend Malatyah. Constantine is said to have taken advantage of the internal strife within the Caliphate following the rise of the Abbasids to make his attack.

Nikephorus, *Mango*, c.70, p.143, confirms the attack on Melitene; as do Yaqubi, Brooks, (1900) 732, and Abu Faraj, who lists the Byzantine commander as: "Ashkirash, captain of the Armaniko . . .", p.112.

¹⁷³ For Hisn Kalidiyah/Claudias (a fortress near Melitene), see Baladhuri, 291, and Abu Faraj, 113. For Kalikala/Theodosiolis/Erzerum see Baladhuri, 312, Theophanes, 116, and Abu Faraj, 113, who also refers to Karnak, but places the events in 755 A.D.

The attack on Kalikala was reported by Baladhuri as having been led by one Kusan al-Armani, who may be identical to Abu Faraj's Ashkirash of the Armaniko. As such he would probably have been the commander of a sizeable detachment from Constantine's main force at Malatyah. Kalikala was also: " . . . razed to the ground;" Baladhuri, 312.

¹⁷⁴ Tabari, Williams, xxvii, 197. No details are given for the raid, and no other source mentions it at all.

¹⁷⁵ Yaqubi, (1900) 732. Of course this contradicts Tabari's account for 750-1, but the general impression for the decade 743-753 is one of inactivity and weakness on the part of the Caliphate.

The accomplishments of Salih's raid are not known.

penetrating imperial territory. Instead, it remained at Duluk and retired upon receiving news of the death of Abu-l-Abbas.¹⁷⁶ Theophanes relates Salih's raid at the head of 80,000 men under the following year. The invaders are said to have turned back upon hearing that Constantine was taking the field.¹⁷⁷ Perhaps there were two raids for 754-5, one before and one after the accession of al-Mansur. But it seems more likely that Yaqubi is mistaken here, for Theophanes and Tabari seem to match each other closely in most of the details.

The lackluster performance of Arab raiders in the early years of al-Mansur's reign may not have troubled the Caliph as he seems to have been more concerned about the state of the border citadels than upon any offensive action. Baladhuri stresses al-Mansur's refortification of previously weakened cities and fortresses:

When Abu Jafar al-Mansur began his rule,
he examined the forts and cities, peopled
and refortified them, and rebuilt those
of them that were in need of being rebuilt.
The same thing he did with the frontier cities.¹⁷⁸

Various sources record a major reconstruction effort put into effect by al-Mansur. Between 757 and 759, al-Mansur directed the refortification of

¹⁷⁶ Tabari, Williams, i, 3.

¹⁷⁷ Theophanes, 119.

¹⁷⁸ Baladhuri, 252. He goes on to state that al-Mahdi (775-85) continued the fortifications work which al-Mansur began.

Zibatrah, al-Massissa, Malatyah, Kalidiyah, Kalikala and Kamkh.¹⁷⁹ At about this time construction was begun on the city of Adanah in Cilicia, which would grow to a major Arab border city over the next century. Finally, Baladhuri notes that Marash was rebuilt at some time during the reign of al-Mansur.¹⁸⁰

The details available for certain of the fortification efforts suggest that they were quite extensive. Marash was strengthened even though it had been rebuilt already by Marwan II in 747-8.¹⁸¹ Al-Massissa too, had been resettled and fortified previously in 750 by Abu-al-Abbas. After an earthquake al-Mansur raised the walls and increased the garrison by 400 men.¹⁸²

Probably the most significant of al-Mansur's refortification efforts was that of Malatyah after its total destruction at the hands of Constantine in 751. In 757-8, al-Mansur sent Salih b. Ali to begin work on the city which had once been a major population center and military staging point. 70,000 workmen and troops were gathered for the task, and when it was completed the walls

¹⁷⁹ Zibatrah - Baladhuri, 299; al-Massisa - Baladhuri, 257; Malatyah and Kalidiyah - Baladhuri, 291-3; Abu Faraj has the reconstruction of Malatyah and Kalonikala (Kalikala) in 755, p.113. Baladhuri records the rebuilding of Kalikala in 757-8; Kamkh - Yaqubi, Brooks(1900) 733; Baladhuri, who generally seems to be in possession of more information on Kamkh, states that it was held by the Byzantines until 766-7, p.289.

¹⁸⁰ Adanah - Baladhuri, 260; for Adanah's growth and its role in later border situation, see Haldon and Kennedy, 107-8. Marash - Baladhuri, 295.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, 294; Tabari, Williams, xxvii, records the Marwanid reconstruction, 121.

¹⁸² In addition, Abu-l-Abbas had already raised the number in the garrison by 400 in 750; Baladhuri, 257.

were defended by 4000 men besides, as Baladhuri puts it: "... the necessary garrison."¹⁸³ In 759-60, a further unit of cavalry was posted at Malatyah specifically to deter imperial attack.¹⁸⁴ Thus, a presumably well fortified city with over 4000 defenders was no longer considered safe from Constantine's forces.¹⁸⁵

In 757-8, Constantine led an expedition to Jaihan, but reportedly fled upon acquiring information concerning the size of the host arrayed against him.¹⁸⁶ This entry in Baladhuri is similar enough to a comment of Theophanes for the previous year as to merit attention. Salih b. Ali is said to have entered imperial territory only to retreat upon hearing that Constantine had taken the field in response. The passages are virtually identical save for the substitution of the imperial forces for those of the Caliphate in the latter instance. In each, the enemy is reported to have fled before greater numbers of the defender. Perhaps what each author has preserved is not similar events for two years,

¹⁸³ *ibid*, 293. For the rest of the fortifications there are no details as to their extent. Kalidiyah is generally treated by the sources as an outpost of Malatyah rather than as an independant fortress. Concerning Kalikala, Baladhuri notes that the population was ransomed from the Byzantines and allowed to resettle in the former locale, 313.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*, 293.

¹⁸⁵ However, the Abbasids were able to accomplish their refortification with comparatively little intervention from the Empire. Since 755-6, Constantine had been embroiled in a bloody war on the western frontier against the Bulgars. According to Theophanes, this conflict was brought on by a series of imperial border fortifications erected by Constantine in order better to control the Bulgars (Theophanes, 119). The war in the west continued irregularly for the rest of Constantine's reign. It is not the intent of this study to address this conflict except as it bears upon the Byzantine/Arab border situation; for the Bulgar wars, see Theophanes, 119-135.

¹⁸⁶ Baladhuri, 293.

but prejudiced views of the occurrences of the same season. If this is so, then both Empire and Caliphate mustered sizable forces for the campaigning period but each declined to commit them against an equally impressive army. Thus, Theophanes relates that after a season of stalemate Salih returned beyond the passes with: "... only those few Armenians who had gone over to him."¹⁸⁷

With the fortifications completed the Caliphate was once more capable of pursuing a more aggressive border policy. This policy was certainly made more tenable by Constantine's involvement in the Bulgar wars in the west. Large Byzantine forces, probably comprising the majority of the Tagmata and at least portions of the western themes, were often in the field at the opposite end of imperial territory. By necessity this would have made any sort of aggressive action on the eastern front a comparatively minor enterprise.¹⁸⁸

While Constantine was personally active in the west, the defence of the east necessarily fell to the various thematic strategoï who came under attack. Such was the case in 759-60, while the Emperor was campaigning rather

¹⁸⁷ Theophanes, 119. This interpretation also coincides with Tabari's record of Salih's retreat.

There is also the possibility that two distinct years' of raiding are recorded by the two sources. Such a confusion would have been easy for Theophanes to make. The year as he records it begins September 1 and ends August 31. Thus Theophanes' year 757-8 would last from 1 September 757 to 31 August 758. Tabari's corresponding entry, following the Arabic calendar with its shorter year, runs from 25 May 757 to 13 May 758.

¹⁸⁸ There are two main phases to the Byzantine/Bulgar conflict. From 758-65, Constantine was in the field every year save for 761-2 and 763-4. The second phase began after Constantine repudiated the peace (of which there are no details) in 772-3 and continued until his death (14 September, 775).

unsuccessfully in the Balkans, Theophanes relates a significant defeat of the army of the Armeniac theme:

The Arabs attacked Romania and took many prisoners. At Melas they joined battle with Paul the general of the Armeniacs; they killed him and a host of soldiers, and brought back many heads, and forty-two important men in bonds.¹⁸⁹

Yaqubi records two more raids for 760-1 and 762-3 but offers no more information on either.¹⁹⁰ Abu Faraj is more informative for the latter event:

And in that same year [1073 of the Greeks, A.D.762] the Arabs went up in wrath against the valley of Germanikeia, which is Marash, because they heard that [their] spies [or scouts] had been enslaved by the Rhomaye. And they carried off the people of the country into captivity, and took them away . . . this they also did with the natives of Samosata.¹⁹¹

The words of Abu Faraj raise a difficulty concerning Marash. The last known reference records an addition to the defences at the order of Mansur.¹⁹²

Apparently during the period between the refortification of Marash under Mansur and 762, there was an increase in the strength of the local Byzantine

¹⁸⁹ Theophanes, 119. There are two rivers by the name Melas, one in coastal Isauria, the other a tributary of the lower Sangarius. Either is possible, since Paul would be far from the Area of the Armeniac theme in either case. Yaqubi confirms the raid but provides no details beyond the name of the commander - al-Abbas; Yaqubi, Brooks (1900) 733.

¹⁹⁰ Yaqubi, Brooks (1900) 733.

¹⁹¹ Abu Faraj, 118.

¹⁹² Baladhuri, 295.

presence. This Byzantine resurgence was enough to provoke a military retaliation by the Caliphate, yet there is no other record of any imperial action. The passage seems to suggest that the city itself was the target of the Arab attack, which would lead one to understand that the Byzantines were in possession of it. Perhaps the reference of Abu Faraj to the 'spies' taken by the Empire should be understood to mean the entire garrison of border guards and therefore the city as well. Rather than re-garrison the city, the Arabs chose to remove their subjects from the district of Marash. A similar case probably obtained for Samosata.¹⁹³

Yaqubi records that the Arabs carried out unspectacular raids for the next several years while Constantine was involved in the Bulgar wars. Tabari is at variance with Yaqubi's details on more than one occasion. For 765-6, Tabari has Salih b. Ali as the leader of the expedition and notes that it remained camped at Dabiq.¹⁹⁴ Yaqubi refers to the raid of al-Fadhl b. Salih b. Ali.¹⁹⁵ Given the custom of both the Empire and the Caliphate exploiting the other's weakness in order to raid over the Taurus border, it is logical to expect

¹⁹³ It appears that this is an instance of Byzantine conquest that went unrecorded by any authority save perhaps for the vague reference of Abu Faraj above. It will be seen that there are other such 'hidden' raids.

¹⁹⁴ Dabiq is: "An important Muslim base on the Byzantine frontier, north of Aleppo;" Tabari, Kennedy, 40. Dabiq is possibly to be identified with Duluk.

¹⁹⁵ Little can be said with any degree of certainty concerning such contradictions. Perhaps Salih sent his son on a minor expedition. Perhaps a Byzantine army was in the field and Salih held his force in reserve in case of need. In any event the season's raiding appears to have been of little consequence.

major assaults to have been launched by the Arabs while Constantine and the Tagmata were occupied in the west. Indeed this would seem to have been the case when the strategos Paul was killed in 759-60. Yet for the next several years, as has been seen above, only minor raids are recorded. This is due to the timely intervention of the Khazars, who launched a major invasion of Muslim Armenia in the 760s.¹⁹⁶ After having caused a great deal of destruction, the Khazars withdrew before the Arab counter-attack arrived at Tiflis to repulse the horde.¹⁹⁷

It is difficult to determine the reasons for the Khazar attack upon Muslim-held Armenia at this time. Tabari states that extra troops were stationed at Tiflis due to concern about a potential revolt, but unless the rebellion materialized it offered no benefit to an attacker.¹⁹⁸ In addition, the Bab al-Lan had come under Muslim domination at some time during the Caliphate of Mansur. Baladhuri suggests that at the beginning of the reign, Bab al-Lan was garrisoned with a guard of Arab cavalry.¹⁹⁹ These factors do

¹⁹⁶ Abu Faraj has 762 A.D., p.114. Theophanes places the assault in 763-4, but says that a second Khazar expedition was made in the following year, 123. Tabari preserves the instance of the Turkish attack in 764-5; Kennedy, 14-5.

Although the date of the attack is certainly open to dispute, all the accounts agree on the scope of the invasion and the damage inflicted upon the populace in the area. Tabari even states that Tiflis fell.

¹⁹⁷ Tabari, Kennedy, 40. Theophanes definitely states that there was a bloody battle between the Turks and the Arabs, 124.

¹⁹⁸ Tabari, Kennedy, 14-5.

¹⁹⁹ Baladhuri, 329.

nothing to indicate that there was any apparent weakness on the part of the Caliphate which the Khazars might exploit. The situation does not seem to have been a propitious one for a successful invasion.

Another explanation exists, but it must remain purely speculative, as no direct evidence is available to substantiate what might be simple coincidence. Since Constantine initiated the war with the Bulgars and even prolonged it when opportunity arose to make peace, it may be assumed that he was confident of his ability not only to defeat the Bulgars, but also to repel the Arabs.²⁰⁰ A bribe to the Khazars to attack Armenia would have allowed Constantine to concentrate on the Bulgarian situation, secure in the knowledge that the Muslim raids would necessarily be minor. He may have arranged this prior to the initiation of the western campaign or as a desperate measure after the defeat of the Armeniacs under Paul. Certainly Constantine had seen examples of a similar stratagem used by his father. Yet no information survives which might substantiate this possibility.²⁰¹

Regardless of the instigation of the Khazar attack, its effect was highly beneficial to the Empire. Apart from the disruption of the region which must have occurred, the Khazars were attacking the very territory which was home to the raiders sent by the Caliphate to loot Byzantine lands. It would have

²⁰⁰ Theophanes, 62.

²⁰¹ See above for similar actions taken by Leo III, see n.71, and p. 69, 74-6. Given the bias of the surviving sources against Constantine, it is hardly surprising that no information on his diplomatic efforts is extant.

been a rash commander indeed who sent out a large raiding expedition only to leave his base exposed to the marauding Khazars. The raiding forces are the most logical units to be involved in any defence or retaliation against the invasion. This would obviously limit the numbers available to plunder across the Taurus. Thus, there is little wonder that there were few raids of note in this period.

With the Khazar threat holding the Arabs on the eastern border in check, Constantine was able to conclude a partially successful campaign against the Bulgars in the summer of 768.²⁰² While the emperor and his tagmata were so involved the soldiers of the Caliphate attacked Kamkh.²⁰³ According to Tabari after a fierce seige the town was taken by storm. Yet for the same event, Theophanes states: ". . . Abd Allah beseiged Kamachon all summer long but withdrew in disgrace without having accomplished anything."²⁰⁴ The following year another raid was made under Yazid b. Usaid, but Tabari notes that: ". . . he did not lead the people to the land of the enemy

²⁰² There is no record of a peace treaty, but hostilities ceased. The summer of 766 saw Constantine lose a large fleet of troop ships in the Black Sea; Theophanes, 126.

²⁰³ Kamacha-Ani or Kamachon, Baladhuri, 288; Tabari, Kennedy, 42; Theophanes, 132. The last reference to Kamkh was in 751 when Constantine threatened it during the Malatyah campaign, Baladhuri, 391. Yet there is no indication that the city fell at that time. Either Constantine succeeded in taking Kamkh in 751 or it fell to another unrecorded Byzantine assault as in the case of Marash.

Incidentally, Baladhuri notes that Kamkh remained hotly contested and changed hands repeatedly over the next century and more; Baladhuri, *passim*.

²⁰⁴ Theophanes, 132. Little can be deduced from such completely contradictory passages, save that perhaps they refer to events from different years.

but stayed at Marj Dabiq."²⁰⁵ Two more years of unimpressive raids followed, and for 769-70, Tabari again relates that the raiders did not go through the passes into imperial lands.

In 770-1, the Caliphate made a more substantial effort and, taking a Byzantine fortress by surprise, they pressed on to raid as far as Laodikeia Katakekaumane, where many prisoners were taken.²⁰⁶ The following year, although it saw only a minor raid, found the Emperor suing for peace with Mansur.²⁰⁷ Yet, as damaging as the attack on Laodikeia may have been, there is nothing to suggest that the attack alone should have convinced Constantine that he was militarily overwhelmed.

Theophanes' Chronographia contains a record of the Arab campaign against the coastal town of Sykes:

[Ibn Wakkas] advanced from Isauria to the fortress of Sykes, which he beseiged. When the Emperor heard of this he wrote to Michael the general of the Anatolics, Manes of the Bukellari, and to Bardanes of the Armeniacs, who all moved to seize the rugged pass which was Ibn Wakkas' exit route. Under its general the protospatharios

²⁰⁵ Tabari, Kennedy, 50. Yaqubi also records the raid but for the previous year, Brooks, (1900) 733.

²⁰⁶ Tabari, Kennedy, 66. Laodkeia Katakekaumene is north-west of Iconion on the military road. Here, as before in Leo's reign, it is quite possible that the city was not captured but had its suburban portions heavily ravaged. Concerning the un-named fortress, it may be assumed that it lay on the military road somewhere between the Cilician gates and Laodikeia. Here, Tabari specifically states that its garrison was seized; thus the citadel's capitulation was probably total.

²⁰⁷ ibid, 70.

Petronas, the Kibyraiote's naval force reached Sykes harbor and anchored there. When he saw this, Ibn Wakkas lost all hope for himself. But he encouraged and inspired his troops, who sallied forth against the mounted thematic troops while shouting their war cry and put them to rout. He killed many of them and captured all the territory roundabouts, then withdrew with much plunder.²⁰⁸

Caution must be exercised in dealing with this account, for it mentioned in no other source and may well exaggerate or misrepresent the situation in any number of ways. Certainly, had the campaign turned out as well as Theophanes suggests, the Arab authorities would have lost no opportunity to report such success. Yet if the essentials of the record are accepted - i.e. that an Arab expedition besieged Sykes, eluded the Byzantine forces sent against it, and then inflicted a defeat upon the imperial forces massed there - then it becomes easier to understand the motivation for Constantine's bid for peace.

Perhaps the most significant factor which led to the Emperor's negotiations with the Caliphate is not directly related to the Arab-Byzantine conflict at all. Since the cessation of conflict against the Bulgars, The Byzantine military appears to have relied upon the thematic troops almost entirely. There is no record of any action taken by the tagmata on the Taurus border or elsewhere.²⁰⁹ The Arab raids on Kamkh and Laodikeia were resisted only by

²⁰⁸ Theophanes, 133.

²⁰⁹ There was, however, a Byzantine offensive launched against Muslim Armenia in 770-1. it was in all likelihood a minor raid carried out by local thematic troops; ibid, 132.

the garrisons of those cities. As has been seen above the troops called upon to relieve Sykes were all thematic. Concerning Kamkh and Laodikeia, it is true that the Emperor and the tagmata were already committed against the Bulgars, but Constantine was obviously aware of the attack on Sykes early enough to take part in its defense. He did so without the use of the tagmata.

In his entry for 755-6, Theophanes records the loss of a fleet of 2600 troop ships in a fierce Black Sea storm. The number is no doubt exaggerated, but the damage to imperial forces appears to have been significant. In all probability, the tagmata (and possibly some thematic troops) would have taken ship to Bulgar lands. If such is the case, Constantine may well have lost the majority of his most seasoned troops to the Euxine tides. This potential crippling of the tagmata would limit Constantine to just the sort of action that he took concerning Sykes. When it became obvious that the thematic troops were inadequate to defend the Taurus unsupported, even the headstrong Constantine would have been left with little choice but to explore non-martial options to safeguard his border.²¹⁰ Mansur's reply to the request is not known, but Arab raiders continued to exploit imperial weakness on the frontier.

In 772-3, another raid was carried out in the region of al-

²¹⁰ Of course, paying off invaders rather than opposing them militarily is a device which dates back before the fall of the western Roman Empire. Economically, paying tribute could well have been more cost-effective than fielding a defense; certainly this is the case if the defense is known to be inadequate. Finally, given Constantine's behavior in his negotiations with the Bulgars, it is overwhelmingly likely that he would have adhered to the peace only for as long as it suited his purpose. For his breaking of the Bulgar treaties, see Theophanes, 119, 125, 134.

Massissa/Mopsuestia. After looting the countryside, the invaders were set upon by the inhabitants of the city and one thousand Arabs are said to have been slain.²¹¹ Yazid b. Usaid surrounded an unnamed fortress and looted the countryside in the following year, but no more is known.²¹² In 774-5, Tabari records an expedition through the Darb al-Hadath which met Byzantine resistance and broke off the raid, presumably to return home.²¹³ The Byzantines encountered were almost certainly local thematic troops. The tagmata could never have reached Hadath in time to stop the invaders. They could only have arrived in time to meet the Arabs deeper in imperial territory. Also, the majority of the surviving tagmata would probably have been serving in the west in the renewed Bulgar wars.

On 14 September 775, amidst the current campaign against the Bulgars, Constantine V died. Less than one month later, Mansur, who had been Caliph for more than half of Constantine's reign, also died. His son and successor, al-

²¹¹ *ibid*, 133. Tabari records a different raid led by Zufar b. Asim al-Hilali; Kennedy, 76. Yaqubi records the raid of Zufar under the following year; Brooks, (1900) 734.

The last known reference to al-Massissa/Mopsuestia is to its repopulation by the Arabs in 758-9, due to Byzantine pressure which forced its inhabitants away; Baladhuri, 257. It is not unlikely that Theophanes is in error in his assertion that the inhabitants of al-Massissa counter-attacked the Arabs. Tabari has the city in Muslim hands only two years later. This would suggest another unrecorded conquest, this time by the Arabs. While this is possible, it is more likely that Theophanes is referring to rural denizens of the region surrounding the city rather than to the inhabitants of the town itself. See Haldon and Kennedy, p.101, for a description of the intermixture of Arab and Byzantine living arrangements on the Taurus frontier.

²¹² Tabari, Kennedy, 79-80. It is worthy of note that Constantine was once more forced to contend with the Bulgars this year; see Theophanes, 134.

²¹³ Tabari, Kennedy, 86. Hadath is Adata.

Mahdi, immediately undertook to strengthen certain of the fortifications along the Taurus border, thus continuing the tradition of increased Arab border defenses begun over three decades before by Hisham. That al-Mahdi saw the need of further fortification is a tribute to the ability of Constantine V, who made the border into a no-man's-land rather than simply an Arab region through which Arab troops passed on looting expeditions. It now remains to analyse the actions and policies of Constantine V in order to arrive at an understanding of his achievement.

A careful analysis of the sources concerning Constantine's treatment of the Arab situation reveals a consistent policy for the Taurus border. To judge by his handling of the Bulgarian border, Constantine obviously favored a very offensive system of defence on all fronts but nowhere was this more evident than in the east. Attacks launched by the Byzantines on Arab territory could realize several benefits beyond the obvious one of a victory on the field.

Certainly successful raids on Muslim possessions would do much to redress the balance of power on the frontier. Economically, any booty could partially or even wholly offset the expenses of a campaign. Such an offensive

campaign, if it resulted in booty, would be far less taxing on the imperial treasury than would a purely defensive reaction.²¹⁴

In addition to the above factors, the effect of Constantine's seizure of several border towns and forts must be assessed for its effect upon the balance of power. During his reign, the Emperor captured ten Arab frontier towns. Of these, six are recorded as having been destroyed rather than garrisoned, one is said to have been occupied and one reported as having been razed and depopulated specifically to negate it as impediment to future Byzantine action in the region.²¹⁵ The above actions go far toward demonstrating the existence of a consistent program enacted by Constantine which was aimed at the establishment of a no-man's-land between the Empire and the Caliphate. Several sound justifications exist for this policy and therefore the abandonment of the captured sites.

Obviously, if a town or fortress has fallen once, its viability as a defensive site has been brought into question. Also, the expenses involved in the refortification and the establishment of a garrison are also likely to have been sizable. Yet, the most prohibitive factor must have been the logistical

²¹⁴ However, the benefits of a successful defensive campaign should not be underestimated - especially if the defenders were to catch the raiders heavily laden with stolen Byzantine goods as they attempted to return home through the passes. While this system of defense was adopted for sound tactical reasons, it also served the unlooked-for purpose of a particularly harsh form of indirect taxation upon the people of the frontier. See Dennis, 138, for the attractiveness of ambushing a laden and homeward bound force.

²¹⁵ Baladhuri, 291.

difficulty of providing economic and military support to the garrison of the new possession. Unless the garrison were self-sufficient (an unlikely possibility in the case of a large body, as would have been necessary to hold a town) it would necessarily have had to rely on either local produce or an imperial shipment of supplies. Local produce on the frontier would have been unreliable and as subject to Arab attack as the site had been previously. Subsidized shipments at the instigation of the Emperor were possible, as may be seen from the grain fleets brought from Africa to the Imperial City in the years prior to the loss of the Carthage to the Muslims. But the expense was in all probability far too high to merit a similar scheme for a series of border towns which did not serve any significant purpose.²¹⁶

When the strategic value of the captured towns is assessed, it becomes apparent that they did not suit the Emperor's purpose. However, to understand this fully it is necessary to analyse the differences between Arab and Byzantine frontier settlement patterns.

Haldon and Kennedy have described the style of settlement in use by the Byzantines' on the border as follows:

The fairly extensive border regions, then, were characterized above all by a concentration of settlement around refuge-points and fortresses,

²¹⁶ Hendy has already demonstrated the extremely local nature of the Byzantine economy in the east during this period. M. Hendy, Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, 300-1500, 557-9.

and the rurlization of urban life.²¹⁷

In contrast, the Muslim model was rather more cosmopolitan:

The main unit of defense was not the isolated castle [of the Byzantines] but the fortified city. These cities were artificially created to serve a military purpose but they soon came to have an economic role, both as local market towns, and as entrepots for trade with the Byzantines.²¹⁸

Generally then, the frontier consisted of Arab walled trading centres in the lowlands surrounded by Byzantine mountain-citadels in positions of natural defensibility.²¹⁹

When this difference between Arab and Byzantine practice is understood, the primary reason for Constantine's policy of destruction becomes clear. It was undesirable, and in fact impossible, for him to hold the captured towns without committing far more men than he could spare. The garrison of a formerly hostile town would require at least as many troops as would a comparably sized city in the imperial heartland, probably more. Instead, by maintaining small, virtually impregnable strongholds near the

²¹⁷ Haldon and Kennedy, 101; Haldon and Kennedy also note the anonymous Hudud al-Alam which describes the standard Byzantine settlement pattern: "Most of the districts are prosperous and pleasant, and have (each) an extremely strong fortress, on account of the frequency of the raids which the fighters of the faith direct upon them. To each village appertains a castle, where in time of flight (they may take shelter)"; Minorsky, Hudud, 156-7.

²¹⁸ ibid, 109.

²¹⁹ Haldon and Kennedy, 101.

invasion routes, it was possible for the border troops to become aware of an impending attack in time to notify the local thematic headquarters. For such a duty, a minimal number of men would be required.²²⁰

Thus, from Constantine's perspective, it was highly efficient both economically and militarily, to allow the captured sites to fall into ruin rather than attempt to man them. In this way, the Caliphate suffered not only the expense of the initial loss, but also the additional costs involved in refortifying and manning the site.²²¹

The focus of the preceding pages has been to explore Constantine's policy of aggressive defense and assessed the merits of such a scheme; it now remains to determine the success or failure of the emperor's actions. Certainly one way of doing so is to analyse the behavior of the Caliphate. As the focus of Constantine's works, the doings of the Muslims can indicate the degree to which the Empire was taken as a threat.

To judge by the amount of refortification carried out by the various Caliphs whose reigns coincided with Constantine's, it is apparent that the

²²⁰ It should be noted that this is precisely the system described in the 6th- and 10th-century manuals on border warfare translated by Dennis; 6th-century, 23-9; 10th-century, 153.

It is also significant that such a force, in addition to being cheaper to maintain, would also have been a less easy and certainly less profitable prize than a rather loosely held town that also served as the hub of the local economy.

²²¹ One need only refer to the preceding pages to find that, for this period, there seemed to have been little question of allowing the ruined sites to remain so.

forces of Islam took the Byzantine attacks very seriously indeed. Every Caliph in question put into effect significant refortification programs. With such money and effort going into defensive works, obviously there would be less support available for offensive actions. Such support was usually necessary, for, as Haldon and Kennedy point out, the annual raids on imperial territory were rarely monetary successes.²²²

The effects of the Byzantine attacks may also be seen in the relative weakness of the Arab raids of this period. For the entirety of Constantine's reign, the Caliphate succeeded in conquering only two sites, as compared to the ten towns and citadels taken by the Emperor. In addition, it is necessary to consider the nature of the fortifications of the Empire and the Caliphate when assessing the significance of the numbers.

As has already been noted, the Byzantines of the border favored a highly defensible, comparatively small, highland fortress surrounded by an essentially unprotected suburb outside its walls. The general mode of defense when attack was imminent was to move all inhabitants of the suburban area, along with any portable wealth, within the safety of the castle walls. While the overburdened facility may not have been able to sustain the additional populace for an extended siege, circumstances argue against the regular occurrence of such an action. It would have been a matter of some difficulty to supply and provision the troops necessary to besiege such a citadel and hold

²²² Haldon and Kennedy, 114-5.

out against any reinforcements sent by the surrounding themes.

It is obvious that any attack against such a settlement would involve the looting of the unprotected and abandoned buildings outside the walls. This would, in all likelihood, have gone on regardless of the success, failure or even existence of an assault on the citadel itself. But the booty acquired from such 'conquests' must have been very small and the disruption of the local lifestyle may well have been equally minor. In such an unstable environment, with the only succor available inside the keep, most things of value would be lost rapidly unless they were portable enough to be carried to safety in times of danger. Further, if the locals were unable to transport some object of value due to its immovability, then the Arabs may well have passed it over as it would have been difficult to take back through the passes.²²³

Given the above pattern of Byzantine settlement, there is a significant possibility that at least some of the Arab 'conquests' of the period were, in fact, only partially successful in the manner described above. This appears to have been the case in the instance of Kamkh in 766-7.²²⁴ It is quite possible that this is at least part of the story behind Theophanes' confusing references to the

²²³ If the relief force did not catch the raiders before the passes, they could easily have gotten into position to ambush them during this most vulnerable stage of the journey. It would have been dangerous to slow the return in such circumstances. See Dennis, 233, for the imperial fondness for this type of attack.

²²⁴ Baladhuri, 288; Tabari, Kennedy, 42; Theophanes, 132. See p. 107, n. 203. Similar partially successful raids appear to have occurred at Ikonion and Akroinion in the reign of Leo; see n.89 above, for Ikonion. For Akroinos, see n.108.

seige of Sykes.²²⁵

If the style of Byzantine settlement on the frontier means that the targets of Arab raids may not have been seriously disturbed by them, the same may not be said in reverse. Given the Arab settlement-type of walled-town, the same defensive options were not available to those within. A walled city might provide a more difficult target initially, but this is debatable because the earthworks were unsupported by any advantage of terrain.²²⁶ Moreover once the walls were taken, the city as a whole, which was generally of some size, was open to the invaders. At this point, even if there were a central strong-hold within the city, it was probably unequal to the task of housing the fleeing citizens and their possessions. Nor did the strong-hold have any more advantage of natural defensibility than did the city itself. Thus, whether the central strong-hold fell or not, Byzantine conquests are likely to have been more 'complete' than their Arab counterparts at this time. In addition, as commercial centres and home to merchants, the Arab city was certainly a

²²⁵ Theophanes, 132-3. The same may also hold for the attack on Laodikeia Katakekumene; see n. 206.

²²⁶ Haldon and Kennedy state: "A few general points can be made in connection with these [frontier Muslim] settlements. The first is that they were all in the plains, on fertile sites beside rivers, and the Arab geographers are lyrical about the richness and fertility of many of them, especially in Cilicia;" Haldon and Kennedy, "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier," 109.

richer prize than a small Byzantine border installation, which even the Muslim sources do not honor with the term 'Madinah' (city).²²⁷

When carefully analysed, it may be seen that Constantine's achievement on the Taurus frontier was extraordinary. The number of conquests tells only part of the story, for his captures were also richer than those of his adversaries. Between the original losses and the expense of refortification it is probable that the Taurus border constituted a greater drain on the Caliphate's financial resources than at any time in the past.²²⁸

Martially, Constantine was as successful as he could reasonably have expected to be. Concerning diplomacy, nothing concrete may be stated. The only possible remnant of the emperor's diplomatic efforts, the invasion of the Khazars into Armenia in the 760s, could as easily have been a timely coincidence.

Perhaps the greatest downfall of Constantine's long reign was his pursuit of the Bulgar conflict. He had only limited success in the west and the concentration of time, money and troops elsewhere allowed the Caliphate the opportunity to take the initiative and reestablish itself on the border unmolested; it is no mere coincidence that this period saw the most damaging

²²⁷ Rather they use the word 'hisn' (fortress) or 'qila' (castle). Haldon and Kennedy, "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier," 96-7.

²²⁸ It should be remembered that, in addition to the actual cost of the construction, the Muslims also allotted to their fighting men stipends for their service. The stipends for this frontier were greater even than normal; Haldon and Kennedy, "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier," 112.

Muslim raids of the entirety of Constantine's reign.

Yet it is important to recall that even these raids, certainly the worst attacks recorded against Constantine, do not compare with the devastation wrought by Arab forces in the previous century, or even with the damage inflicted during the time of Leo III. The defenses of the Empire, even though somewhat anemic after the loss of a considerable number of the Tagmata to the Black Sea, appear to have been capable of bearing up under the might that the Abbasids were able to muster against them.²²⁹

As has been seen, over the course of Constantine's rule, the fortunes of the Empire on the border rose significantly. Through a carefully aggressive campaign of consistent attack and depopulation of the enemy's holdings, the Emperor was able to build upon the foundation established by his father, Leo III. Constantine also appears to have possessed Leo's ability to discern the possible from that which was beyond his grasp. Just as Leo saw that his forces could not bear up under the strain of a reign of constant border warfare, Constantine saw that his own Empire was not capable of a war of reconquest. What the Empire was capable of -- establishing a strong presence on the frontier and thereby asserting itself as a power to be reckoned with by the Caliphate -- Constantine accomplished admirably.

²²⁹ Obviously the state of the Caliphate also must be taken into account. The Abbasids, even after the revolution which put them in power, faced significant revolts and challenges to their regime; this must have diverted considerable attention from the western frontier. Yet, it is apparent above that there were far more factors contributing to the redress of the balance of power than the internal difficulties of the Caliphate can claim.

VII

CONCLUSION

The forgoing analysis of the military interaction of Leo and Constantine with the Caliphate makes it possible to discern patterns of activity and to assess the value of the imperial response to Arab attack. It can now be seen that no such analysis would be possible without the inclusion of the non-Byzantine sources. These provide information which is found nowhere else and, although they occasionally raise more questions than they answer, it is these texts which contain the necessary data to check the testimony of Theophanes and Nikephorus.

It is also obvious that there is more to be done on the subject than has been attempted here. There are other Arabic sources, more peripheral to this study than Tabari, but of value nonetheless. Until these texts are made available in translation they will be beyond the reach of many Byzantinists. However, while the current work may not be complete, it can contribute certain insights into the military situation on the Taurus border in the eighth century.

It quickly becomes apparent that Bury was not far off in his general assessment of the Isaurian Emperors' military acumen. But it is possible to glean more detail from the Arab sources, detail which allows for a more specific understanding of the tactics and practices of the imperial forces. This

detail shows that both Leo and Constantine had capable military minds and were able to separate the practical from the unattainable. Each seems to have been capable of matching the resources available to the task at hand. Both father and son perceived correctly that the Empire need fear for its existence against the might of their neighbor to the east. Should the Caliphate ever throw all of its power to the west of the Taurus, all other imperial concerns would have to be subjugated to the central issue of continued survival.

In fact, the invasion of 715-18 was something not far from such a situation. Leo's ability in blunting the thrust and in severely punishing the forces of Islam at this time have long been recognised and need not be dwelt upon. But the impact the invasion may have had upon the Empire and the new Emperor should not be overlooked. From that time forward, Leo made every effort to be certain that the Caliphate never again gained the opportunity to marshal such an expedition.

It would have been difficult for Leo to have escaped the conclusion that the Empire only narrowly avoided annihilation at the hands of the Muslims in 718. He appears to have reacted immediately to the post-invasion situation by alternately damaging the already weakened Arab border zone and fortifying his own defenses. As the Caliphate recovered, attack no longer was a viable option for Leo. Instead, he concentrated upon the Empire's relatively meager defenses. Against even a modest invasion force, it would have been impossible for the Emperor's armies to prevail if Leo had launched an attack

against the entirety of the invaders. Yet, in order to raid and loot effectively, the Arab forces commonly separated shortly after entry into imperial territory. By following a Byzantine tactical dictum in use two centuries before and after his time, Leo was able to inflict small scale but widespread damage on the raiders. In due course, Leo pushed back the zone of conflict to the region bordering the Taurus. Only rarely did the Arabs penetrate beyond the mountains in sufficient force to cause real concern in Constantinople; when they did, the Emperor was able to respond with the necessary troops to confront the enemy. The long trek through Asia Minor gave Leo adequate time to muster the themes near the capital to supplement the Tagmata. The results may be seen in the encounter at Akroinon in 739.

Thus, through guerilla tactics and the careful application of force to obliterate the raiding tendrils of the main Arab host, Leo was able to safeguard the bulk of Imperial land from devastation. By allowing the situation in the border-zone to remain in the same state of chaos in which it had been for a century or more, the Emperor insured his overtaxed military of a viable method for protecting the Empire as a whole.

To this military solution Leo added a diplomatic one. By seeking out other enemies of the Caliphate and making common cause, Leo was able to ensure that the Caliphate would be unable to bring overwhelming numbers to bear against Asia Minor. Remaining active in Transcaucasian politics, Leo stirred up resentment of Muslim power among the Khazars, Alans and others.

While this brought no conquests to the Empire, it forced the Caliphate to commit troops and funds to pacification and governance of the area and to the retention of Arab power in the region. On occasion, it also provided Leo with timely and much needed aid when sizable Arab armies appeared over the Taurus. With the opportunity to call upon various Transcaucasian allies to menace the rear of any Arab invasion, the Emperor held a weapon against the Caliphate which could not be countered by pouring greater forces into Asia Minor.²³⁰

When Constantine became Emperor on his father's death, the military capabilities of the Empire continued to grow. Constantine immediately took the offensive and extended the zone of conflict to include the Arab border-citadels and towns. Upon establishing such a new balance of power, Constantine forced the Caliphate to exert significant resources simply to protect its own territories from imperial attack. Coupled with the internal distress in years just prior to and including the Abbasid Revolution, this had the effect of placing the armies of Islam almost entirely on the defensive. Constantine, meanwhile, was able to create a no-man's-land of ruined or poorly defended Muslim towns and fortresses under the surveillance of his own border troops.

²³⁰ The attacks by Malamah b. Abd-al-Malik and then by Marwan b. Muhammad upon the the Transcaucasian lands may have been an attempt to bring these peoples under sufficient control to remove this threat from the Imperial arsenal. Although successful in the short term, the Abbasid Revolution seems to have been enough to allow the tribes of the region to renew their independence.

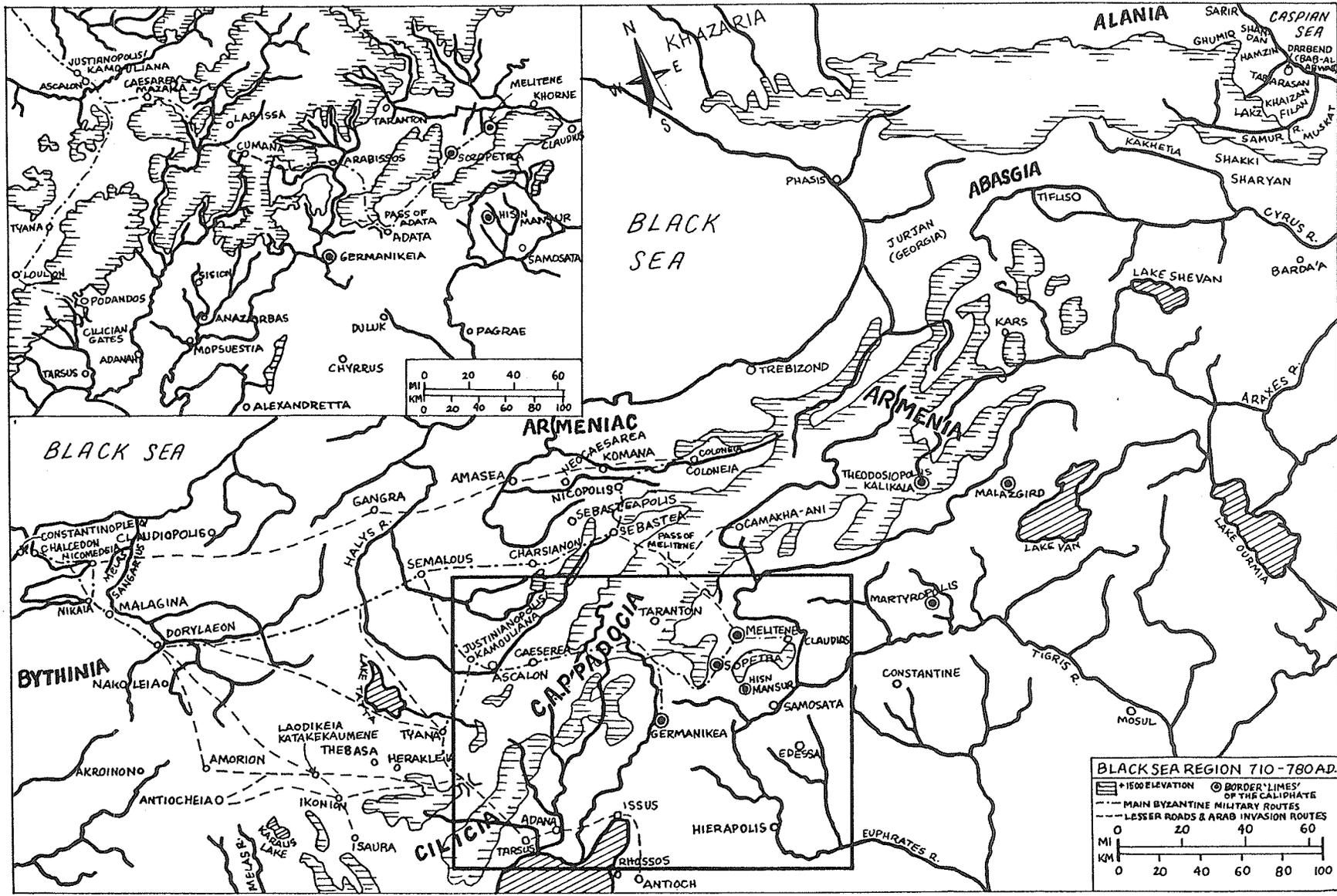
This redress in the balance of power on the Taurus was firmly enough established to survive even while the Emperor was committing significant forces to the wars against the Bulgarians on his western border (758-65 A.D and 772-5). Upon Constantine's death The Empire's eastern border was more secure than at any time since the advent of Islam.

Unlike his father, Constantine's answer to difficulties on the Taurus seems to have been wholly military. If he gave any thought to the furtherance of Leo's diplomatic efforts there appears to be no record of it. To his credit, the Byzantine armed forces appear to have been equal to the task he set before them: the preservation of the Empire's territories.

Treadgold accuses Constantine of contributing little to his Empire over the course of his reign because: ". . . he did no lasting damage to either enemy [Arab or Bulgarian] and gained no territory for his Empire."²³¹ While Treadgold later states that this was due more to the limitations of the Empire's ability rather than his own, it seems clear that he has misunderstood Constantine's purpose. The intentional destruction of more than one captured site demonstrates that Constantine did not wish to expand his Empire. He did want to defend firmly and easily the lands he held. To this end, he set about destroying the staging points for Arab attacks and thereby creating an environment hostile to their raiders where before it had been territory readily and carelessly traversed.

²³¹ Treadgold, Byzantine Revival, 7.

The course of eighth century military relations between the Empire and the Caliphate demonstrates a steady and pronounced improvement for the Byzantines over the years 715-775. The fortunes of the Empire went from essentially powerless prior to the attack on Constantinople in 716, to quite adequately defended under Leo III. It fell to his son, Constantine V, to take the rejuvenated Empire of Leo and carried the battle to the Caliphate, securing the accomplishments of his father and providing sufficient power and resources to survive the ravages of the reigns of his immediate successors - Leo IV, Constantine VI and Irene I.



BLACK SEA REGION 710-780 AD.

[Shaded Area] +1500 ELEVATION [Circle with Dot] BORDER LINES OF THE CALIPHATE
 [Dashed Line] MAIN BYZANTINE MILITARY ROUTES
 [Solid Line] LESSER ROADS & ARAB INVASION ROUTES

0 20 40 60 80 100
 MI
 0 20 40 60 80 100
 KM

SOURCES CONSULTED IN MAP COMPILATION

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