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BYZANTINO-ARABICA: THE CONFERENCE OF RAMLA, A.D. 524

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THE Conference of Ramla is, undoubtedly, the most important episode in the diplomatic annals of Arab-Byzantine relations before the rise of Islam. In A.D. 523, Justin I (A.D. 518–527) sent Abraham, son of Euphrasius, his specialist on Arabian affairs, to negotiate a peace with the Lakhmid King, Mundhir, who had successfully campaigned against Byzantium and had even captured the two Roman dukes, Timostratus, son of Silvanus, and John, son of Lucas. The diplomatic mission was successful, and a peace treaty was concluded in February A.D. 524 at Ramla, a locality to the south-east of Hira. In addition to the liberation of the two dukes for a very high ransom, Abraham interceded effectively on behalf of the Diophysites as well as of the Monophysites who were living in Mundhir's jurisdiction. These successes alone would have given Abraham's mission a respectable place in the history of Byzantine-Lakhmid relations; but a new and unexpected development gave that mission a wider significance. During the Conference, an envoy arrived from South Arabia dispatched by the newly established Jewish ruler Masrûq, announcing the massacre of the Christians of Najrân and asking Mundhir and the Persian king to do likewise to the Christian communities in their realms. The arrival of the South Arabian envoy obscured the Byzantine-Lakhmid phase of the Conference and opened a new phase which involved Byzantium in the world of the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Ethiopic-

Himyaritic conflict. This involvement culminated in the contribution of a fleet which transported the Ethiopic expeditionary force across the Red Sea. South Arabia fell and was converted into an Ethiopic dependency, a fact which was to have far-reaching consequences on the history of the Arabs and Arab-Byzantine relations.

I

The material for reconstructing the history of this diplomatic transaction is scattered in secular and ecclesiastical sources of various orders. The secular sources, Procopius and Nonnosus, inform briefly on the main objective of the diplomatic mission, the liberation of the two dukes. It is the ecclesiastical sources, however, notably the *Martyrium Arethae* and the *Letter of Simeon of Beth Arsham*, which supply the most detailed and valuable information and complement the accounts of the secular sources on religious and ecclesiastical matters in which Byzantium, Iran, and the Lakhmids, are involved.¹ Of these two ecclesiastical

¹ For the *Martyrium* in its various versions, see A. Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites*, (Lund, 1924), p. xxiv, n. 1. Of these the best is the Greek version. The text was first edited by J. Fr. Boissonade in *Anecdota Graeca* (Paris, 1833; photocopy reprint, Hildesheim, 1962), V, 1–62; later in 1869 E. Carpentier published the Greek version again with a Latin translation and a commentary in *Acta Sanctorum*, X, October, 721–59, which will be referred to as ASS. On his manuscript see ASS, p. 721. The Metaphrastic version is included in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, CXV (2), cols. 1249–90, accompanied by a Latin version. The Arabic text of the *Martyrium* has not yet been published, for which see Moberg, *Book*, p. xxiv, n. 1, I, d. The Karshûni manuscript referred to in Moberg's note

sources, the *Martyrium* reflects most adequately the Byzantine profile of Abraham's mission, but its accounts need and deserve much examination and clarification. It has preserved a long list of the names of the participants at the Conference of Ramla. This list is the key to understanding the complex character of the Conference: the various groups who participated, and the various issues involved which bore on the religious, economic, and political aspects of Near Eastern history and the history of Arab-Byzantine relations. But it is only after the identification and classification of these names have been attempted that the issues involved can be clarified.²

is being prepared for publication by the present writer. The best text of the *Letter* of Simeon of Beth Arsham is Guidi's accompanied by an Italian translation: I. Guidi, "La Lettera di Simeone vescovo di Beth-Arsham sopra i martiri omeriti," in *Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei, Memorie della classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, VII (Rome, 1881), 471-515. More accessible is an English translation by the late Professor Arthur Jeffery in *The Muslim World*, XXXVI (1946), 204-16, which will be referred to in this article as Jeffrey, *Letter*. For various editions of this letter see *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis*, pp. 24 ff. References to the embassy are also to be found in three other works: Agapius of Manbij, *Kitāb al-'Unwān*; Bar-Hebraeus, *Tārīkh Mukhtaṣar al-Duwal*, ed. A. Ṣāḥḥāni (Beirut, 1890), p. 148; *Histoire Nestorienne* (Chronique de Séert), trans. Adai Scher, *Patrologia Orientalis*, VII, 144. For Nonnosus see Müller, *FHG*, IV, 179; for Procopius see *History*, I. xvii. 44; neither gives a date for the embassy of Abraham which is accurately given in the *Letter* of Simeon.

² A. A. Vasiliev was the first to tell the story of the Conference of Ramla at length; see *Justin the First*, "Dumbarton Oaks Studies," I (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), 278-83, and its useful bibliography on problems related to the Conference. But the problems which the accounts of this Conference inevitably raise are not adequately discussed or brought out, and some of his identifications and interpretations cannot be accepted. See also brief notices of the Conference in the standard works of J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, II, 324, of E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-empire*, p. 266, and a more detailed notice in the recent work of B. Rubin, *Das Zeitalter Justinians*, (Berlin, 1960), pp. 272-73, 310-11, which has a valuable bibliography on pre-Islamic Arabia. For Mundhir and the history of the Lakhmids, the standard work is still G. Rothstein, *Die Dynastie der Lahmiden in al-Hira* (Berlin, 1899); the Conference of Ramla is briefly noticed on pp. 79-80.

The List

The *Martyrium* mentions the names of seven personages who were present at Ramla, to whom may be added the name of Sergius mentioned in the *Letter*.³ Thus the full list comprises eight participants: (1) Abraham, (2) Sergius, (3) Simeon of Beth Arsham, (4) John Mandinos, (5) Isaac, (6) Shilas, (7) Aggaios, and (8) the Son of Job.

(1) Abraham: the principal Byzantine representative.⁴

(2) Sergius: mentioned once in the *Letter*. He is accurately described as the bishop of Ruṣāfa (Sergiopolis), who accompanied Abraham on his peace mission.

(3) Simeon, of Beth-Arsham: the well-known Monophysite figure in Persia, and the representative of the Monophysites at the conference.⁵

³ For these names, see Boissonade, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-40; for Sergius, see Guidi, *La lettera*, p. 487.

⁴ Vasiliev seems to question the fact that he was a presbyter and tries to account for it; but diplomats were chosen sometimes from Christian ecclesiastics for whom the Arabs had great reverence; for another ecclesiastic-diplomat, who was sent to Mundhir, see Malalas, *Chronographia* (Bonn), pp. 466-67. Abraham's father and son were both diplomats in the service of Byzantium. The *Letter* gives his father's name in Syriac as part of his patronymic, and it may be transliterated "Euphrasius"; see Guidi, *La lettera*, p. 487; Rubin prefers "Euporos," see *ZJ*, pp. 310-11. "Eugenius" is a *lapsus calami* for "Euphrasius" in "Ghassan and Byzantium, a new *terminus a quo*," *Der Islam*, XXXIII, Heft, 3, p. 237, n. 18. His son was Nonnosus, well known through his book which was abstracted by Photius, for which see "Byzantium and Kinda," *BZ* (1960), pp. 57-73. The name Nonnosus is undoubtedly Semitic; it is in all probability the Syriac name *Nūnā*, "fish," a common Christian name, to which is added the Syriac diminutive ending "ūsā." There can be no doubt that the three spoke Arabic and were Semites; whether they were "Sarcens" is hard to say; cp. Bury, *LRE*, II, 326, n. 2; Vasiliev, *Justin*, p. 279.

⁵ The writer of the famous *Letter*; for his *vita* see *Patrologia Orientalis*, XVII, 137-58. Strangely enough, Bury (p. 324) considers him the ambassador whom Justin dispatched to negotiate peace with Mundhir; Stein also misconceived the position of Simeon in the Conference and his relation to Abraham and Mundhir: Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 266. Vasiliev includes in his list of participants at Ramla two Simeons, the famous Monophysite figure and another one whom he describes as "the priest (presbyter) and apokrisiarius, that is ambassador, Simeon, for the orthodox Christians in Persia": Vasiliev, *Justin*, p. 280; it is possible that there were two Simeons, but it is unlikely.

(4) Isaac: the Metaphrastic version gives him great prominence in that it limits the participants at the conference to three: Abraham, Shilas, and Isaac. He is described as a presbyter and the *apokrisiarios* of the Orthodox Christians in Persia: he is closely associated with Abraham in all the versions of the *Martyrium*, which clearly indicates that by "Orthodox" the martyrologist means "Diophysite."⁶

(5) John Mandinos: this cognomen argues for a Mandaeen background. He is a subdeacon and so he must have accompanied one of the ecclesiastical superiors at the conference. From his association with Isaac it could be inferred that he was a Diophysite in Isaac's party rather than a Monophysite in Simeon's.⁷

(6) Shilas: a well-known figure, the Nestorian Catholicus in Persia.⁸

The Greek text of the *Martyrium* on which Vasiliev's statement is based may have inadvertently substituted Simeon for Isaac, the representative of the Orthodox in Persia (see notes 6 and 7); alternatively, the Martyrologist compiling from Syriac sources may not have realized that the Monophysite writer would have referred to Simeon as "orthodox," since the Monophysites considered themselves, not the Chalcedonians, as the orthodox; hence the confusion in the Greek text of the *Martyrium*.

⁶ Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 40; the Metaphrastic version describes him most adequately: *πρεσβύτερος και τῶν ἐν Περσίῃ χριστιανῶν ὀρθοδόξων ἀποκρισιάριος*, Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 39, n. 1; see also *PG*, col. 1277; on *apokrisiarios* (legate) see O. Braun, *ZDMG* (1900), p. 381. The Metaphrastic version indicates that Isaac was dispatched to the conference by the Persian king; this is possible as the Persian king at this period was courting the friendship of Chalcedonian Justin and so he could very well have sent as his representative an ecclesiastic who was of the same doctrinal persuasion as Justin's envoy, Abraham. But it is quite likely that the Metaphrastic version erroneously linked him with the party of the Persian king. If so, then Isaac would have been at Ramla representing the Diophysites of Persia, just as Simeon was, representing the Monophysites. His association with Abraham and his Persian connection are both reflected in a statement which only the Latin version has preserved and which deserves to be brought out and quoted: *Abraamius autem ipse quoque foedere inito cum Alamundaro, salutatoque Isacio in Persidem revertente, rediit . . .*, *PG*, col. 1279. As a participant at the Conference of Ramla, Isaac escaped the notice of Vasiliev.

⁷ Boissonade, *op. cit.*, pp. 39, 40.

⁸ On Shilas see *Histoire Nestorienne, Patrologia Orientalis*, VII, 135-38.

(7) Aggaios: this figure, who is described in *Cod. Paris. Graec.* 1454 as *κόμητος Ἀγγαίου, υἱοῦ Ζήτ, ἐθνάρχου ὄντος χριστιανῶν τῆς πάσης παρεμβολῆς*⁹ has so far defied identification,¹⁰ and the group he belonged to has not been determined. But the solution of both problems is possible, and it should throw light on other related problems which bear on the history of the Lakhmid dynasty.

Aggaios¹¹ is none other than the Greek equivalent of Arabic Ḥajjāj, a historical figure attested in one of the sources for this period. The *Nestorian Chronicle of Sert* refers to an Arab by the name of Ḥajjāj in connection with a religious controversy between the Monophysites and the Nestorians at the court of Mundhir during the reign of Justin.¹² Aggaios, therefore, is an Arab figure associated with the Lakhmid Mundhir, *not* with the Byzantine party. It is also certain from the accounts of that *Chronicle* that he was not a Nestorian; he is referred to as a "heretic," thus he must have been either a Monophysite or a Diophysite. This identification will solve the problem of the term *κόμητος* which is used in the *Martyrium* to describe Aggaios and which could assign him to the Byzantine Party,¹³ if *κόμητος* were a transliteration of the Latin technical term *comes*. The same *Chronicle* which has made possible the identification of Aggaios as a Christian Arab in Mundhir's party affords a key to solving the problem of *κόμητος*.

⁹ This reading was accepted by E. Carpentier for his text of the *Martyrium* in *ASS* in preference to that of *Cod. Paris. Graec.* 1537, which was the basis of Boissonade's recension; on these codices see Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Th. Nöldeke, *Die Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden* (Leyden, 1879), pp. 312, n. 5; G. Rothstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-10, n. 1; Vasiliev, *Justin*, p. 280; B. Rubin, *ZJ*, p. 310.

¹¹ Ἀγγαῖος is the Greek form of Haggai, the O. T. Prophet.

¹² *Patrologia Orientalis*, VII, 143.

¹³ B. Rubin, *ZJ*, p. 310, clearly implies a Byzantine connection.

Ḥajjāj is described in the *Chronicle* as “*ṣāhib*,” a companion of Mundhir, and the Martyrologist might have had the term “companion” in mind which he rendered *comes*, in a non-technical sense.¹⁴ An alternative explanation of this term is afforded by the patronymic, “son of Qays,” given to Ḥajjāj in the *Chronicle*. In the Syriac script bar Qays ܩܝܣܐ ܒܪܐܘܢܐ bears a resemblance to *comes* transliterated ܩܘܡܝܣܐ. The Martyrologist, while translating and adapting, possibly from a Syriac original, could have easily confused the patronymic “bar Qays” with the Byzantine title *comes* which very often is left transliterated in the Syriac sources.

(8) The son of Job: just as a valuable passage in the *Nestorian Chronicle* has made possible the identification of Aggaios and has disclosed his patronymic, so does *Cod. Paris. Graec. 1537* of the *Martyrium* contribute a better and fuller reading which adds the name of another important figure to the participants at Ramla. The Codex reads: *παρόντος καὶ Ἀγγαίου κόμητος υἱοῦ Ζῆδ, καὶ υἱοῦ Ἰῶβ, ἐθνάρχου χριστιανοῦ πάσης τῆς παρεμβολῆς*. This reading introduces a new figure *υἱοῦ Ἰῶβ*, “son of Job,” and describes him as “the Christian ethnarch of all the Pemble,” i.e. the commander in charge of the military encampments, a phrase which has been wrongly construed with Aggaios.¹⁵ The inclusion of “son of Job” in the list will also solve the problem of *υἱοῦ Ζῆδ*, “son of Zayd” which precedes the “son of Job.” In both Codices, Paris. Graec. 1454 and 1537, “son of Zayd” appears as the patronymic of Aggaios, but the fuller

reading of Codex 1537 with the new patronymic it adds, namely, “son of Job” clearly indicates that “son of Zayd” has to go with “son of Job” and not with Aggaios: (i) Aggaios is known to be the “son of Qays” from the external evidence of the *Nestorian Chronicle* and it has already been argued that this patronymic is probably concealed under the erroneous transliteration *comes*; (ii) what is more important is the fact that “son of Job” in the text stands as a patronymic without a *praenomen*, and this is unnatural. The term Zayd, then, is none other than the *praenomen* for the patronymic, “son of Job,” just as Aggaios is for the patronymic “son of Qays.” The Martyrologist or the scribe, bewildered by Arabic patronymics, unwittingly or erroneously repeated the word *υἱοῦ*, “son,” before Ζῆδ and separated Ζῆδ from its patronymic *υἱοῦ Ἰῶβ* by the conjunction *καὶ* which should have preceded Ζῆδ, not followed it.¹⁶ A decisive corroboration of this suggested emendation is available and it rests on a correct identification of the new figure “son of Job.”

One of the ancestors of the famous pre-Islamic poet of Ḥira, ‘Adiyy was called Zayd ibn-Ayyūb (son of Job).¹⁷ In the genealogies he appears as the poet’s grandfather. As ‘Adiyy’s *floruit* was towards the end of the sixth century, his ancestor Zayd must have been alive towards the beginning of the same century and could have been a contemporary of the events and the personages described in

¹⁶ This case of dittography must have been the cause of Nöldeke’s inability to identify Aggaios and to construe Ζῆδ correctly with *υἱοῦ Ἰῶβ*. He also overlooked *υἱοῦ* which precedes *Ἰῶβ* and thus translated the passage “Comes Ἀγγαῖος(?), Sohn des Ζῆδ, und Ἰῶβ . . .”. This oversight must also have prevented him from connecting Ζῆδ with *Ἰῶβ* and it accounts for what he says on the age of *Ἰῶβ*; see Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, p. 312, n. 5. Perhaps the text originally read as follows: *παρόντος καὶ Ἀγγαίου κόμητος, καὶ Ζῆδ, υἱοῦ Ἰῶβ ἐθνάρχου χριστιανοῦ πάσης τῆς παρεμβολῆς*

¹⁷ See *Aghāni* (Beirut, 1955), II, 80–81; also R. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, pp. 45–48.

¹⁴ Loose application of technical terms is not uncommon; see Malalas, *Chronographia*, p. 463, on *dux*.

¹⁵ Vasiliev, *Justin*, p. 280, and Rubin, *ZJ*, p. 310, who have overlooked the reading of *Cod. Paris. Graec. 1537*, following Carpentier’s text, although Carpentier quoted the variant reading in his notes; see *ASS*, X, 744; see also Boissonade, *Anecdota Graeca*, p. 39.

the *Martyrium*. Therefore, onomastically and chronologically, Zayd ibn-Ayyūb of the genealogists can easily be identified with the *ἰωὺ* *Iōβ* of the *Martyrium*. Other relevant considerations clinch the argument in favor of this identification: (a) ibn-Ayyūb (Job) is an extremely rare name in the Arabic onomasticon before Islam;¹⁸ it is, therefore, quite unlikely that Ayyūb and *Iōβ* were merely namesakes, two different fathers of two sons each of whom was called Zayd; (b) the House of 'Adiyy had adopted Christianity as the biblical name Job clearly indicates, and this is consonant with the description of the "son of Job" as the *Christian* ethnarch; (c) it was an illustrious House, whose members, including Ayyūb and Zayd, held public office under the Lakhmids, a fact which is consistent with the description of Zayd as the "commander of all the military encampment." It is quite likely that the anonymous Christian Arab chief, mentioned in the *Letter* as having remonstrated with Mundhir vehemently when the latter felt inclined to massacre the Christians after the arrival of Masrūq's letter, was this Zayd, son of Ayyūb.¹⁹

¹⁸ It is stated in *Aghāni*, II, 80, that this ancestor of 'Adiyy's was the first Arab to assume the name Ayyūb (Job).

¹⁹ Cp. the description of the anonymous chief in the *Letter*: "... because of his family, and because of his recognition, for he was a great man in the world, and one of the headmen in Hirta," Jeffrey, *Letter*, p. 210. Alternatively, this anonymous Christian chief could have been the *Ταζάβης* Dayzan mentioned by Malalas in connection with the events of a few years later; see *Chronographia*, p. 460. It would be superfluous to emphasize the importance of such identifications for the history of the Arabs before the rise of Islam, whose accounts, recorded in the Muslim era, rest on an oral tradition. In this case, the interlocking of an Arabic source with a Greek one has made certain that Zayd ibn-Ayyūb is not a genealogist's fabrication but a real historical personage. The further information in the *Martyrium* that he was the Christian ethnarch of all the Parembolē throws important light on the position of the Christians under the rule of the pagan Mundhir. From the statement on Zayd in the *Martyrium* it is clear that the Christian element in Mundhir's army was grouped together and was commanded by a Christian chief.

Two Conferences

The unusual number of participants at this Conference raises the question whether the *Martyrium* has united the proceedings of two different conferences in one and the same passage. The most important fact which points towards this conclusion is the participation of Shilas the Nestorian Catholicus, who is known to have died in A.D. 523 at the latest. The Conference at Ramla took place early in February, A.D. 524,²⁰ and this date definitely excludes the participation of Shilas at that Conference.²¹ The reference to Ḥajjāj (Aggaios), is also relevant in this connection. The *Nestorian Chronicle*²² brings Ḥajjāj and Shilas together before Mundhir in a religious controversy at Ḥira. These two must, therefore, have attended a previous conference there. It will be remembered that the party of Abraham and Simeon had tarried at Ḥira before they set out for Ramla on January 20, 524. This date is so close to the year 523 that it is possible that that conference in which Shilas and Ḥajjāj participated had just taken place late in A.D. 523 at Ḥira. Documentation of such a conference in 523 is not lacking, since Simeon of Beth-Arsham refers at the beginning of his famous *Letter* to a previous letter he had written in which he praised the presbyter Abraham for his services to the Monophysite party.²³ Very

²⁰ According to Simeon's *Letter*, the party set out from Hira on January 20th, A.D. 524 and reached Ramla after a ten-day journey on January 30th; the Conference took place at Ramla early in February; see Jeffrey, *Letter*, p. 204.

²¹ *Histoire Nestorienne*, *Patrologia Orientalis*, VII, 144-45; also p. 144, n. 5, Vasiliev's statement: "But we know that he was still alive in 524" begs the question, since it is based on the *Martyrium*; see Vasiliev, *Justin I*, p. 282, n. 42.

²² *Histoire Nestorienne*, *Patrologia Orientalis*, VII, 143.

²³ "About him we have already written in our previous letter, for we and all the faithful who are with us are in receipt of his goodness, for in everything he is assisting our part of the faithful, and he knows well what formerly we wrote and what we now are writing," Jeffrey, *Letter*, p. 204. The *Nestorian*

likely this letter refers to this first conference held at Ḥira late in A.D. 523.

From the preceding analysis the following conclusions may be drawn: (1) Before the Conference of Ramla, another conference had been held in Ḥira probably late in A.D. 523. Shilas could have participated in this conference during which his colloquy with Ḥajjāj might have taken place. It is clear, however, that he did not

attend the Conference of Ramla. (2) Negotiations with Mundhir passed through two stages: at Ḥira late in A.D. 523 and at Ramla in 524.

Ḥira, A.D. 523

Little can be inferred about this conference from Simeon's *Letter*. But it is quite clear from the evidence of the same *Letter* that Abraham did intercede on behalf of the Monophysites of Persia before February A.D. 524 and this could very well have been at this earlier Conference at Ḥira in 523. Shilas might have attended this Conference in Ḥira both as the Catholicus of the Nestorians and the opponent of the Persian Monophysites. Ḥajjāj and Zayd may be added to the list. This Conference at Ḥira could have been attended by all the participants listed in the *Martyrium* and the *Book*.

The *Letter* refers also to an ambassador dispatched to Ḥira by the *Christian King* of South Arabia,²⁴ just before Masrūq gained the upper hand, and who definitely was at Ḥira in A.D. 523–24. This reference raises speculation as to what was behind this embassy. It is possible that the ambassador was on a political mission for improving relations between the new Christian ruler and the Lakhmid Mundhir, since the last recorded encounter between the Lakhmids and the Ḥimyarites had been a bloody one a few years before.²⁵ It is also possible that the object of the

Chronicle involves Justin in the expulsion of the Monophysites from Mundhir's realm: *Patrologia Orientalis*, VII, 142–45. The partisan character of the Nestorian account is obvious, although it is possible that Justin might on some occasion have exercised his influence with Mundhir against the Monophysites. However, as far as the events of A.D. 523–24 are concerned, an examination of the contemporary sources reveals that, far from intriguing against the Monophysites, the Byzantine embassy, represented by Abraham, did the contrary and actually interceded on their behalf. Vasiliev is aware of the difficulty of accepting literally the accounts of that *Chronicle*; nevertheless, he thought that the Byzantine embassy did negotiate with Mundhir against the Monophysites; he says: "The expulsion of the Monophysites from al-Mundhir's kingdom must have been source of satisfaction to Justin's ambassador Abraham and to Justin himself"; further, he says of Justin's envoys: "They were very much pleased with the expulsion of monophysite refugees from the kingdom of al-Mundhir"; Vasiliev, *Justin I*, pp. 282, 283.

The assistance rendered by Abraham to the Monophysite cause in Persia requires an explanation, since the reign of Justin I witnessed an anti-Monophysite persecution, and Abraham was Justin's ambassador. It is possible that Abraham acted unofficially, as a pious Christian, and he might have had Monophysite leanings himself. His efforts on behalf of the Monophysites also accord well with the view that Justin adopted a more lenient attitude towards them after the assassination of Vitalian; see Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, pp. 222–25. More probably, Abraham reacted as an imperial diplomat, thoroughly familiar with the interaction and interrelation of political and religious factors in the Arabian Peninsula, and thus he could see the political value of supporting the Monophysites of Persia. The presence of the ambassador of the Monophysite ruler of South Arabia at Ḥira (see note 24) might have drawn his attention to the necessity of supporting the Monophysites in the interests of amicable relations between Byzantium and the important Ethiopic-Ḥimyaritic world. The course of events which followed the Conference in quick succession certainly justified his support of Simeon's party; Byzantium was understandably anxious over the change of rulers and religions in South Arabia, and the restoration of that country to a ruler and a religion favorable to Byzantium could best be achieved through the Monophysites of Egypt and Ethiopia.

²⁴ Jeffrey, *Letter*, p. 210; this Christian king is referred to twice, although anonymously, in the *Letter*, pp. 205, 210. It is not clear whether he was a native Ḥimyarite or an Ethiopian set up by the Negus. The reference to this Christian king of South Arabia is most important for a discussion of the vexed question of the first Ethiopic invasion.

²⁵ For the inscription which commemorated the campaign of the South Arabian King Ma'd-Karib Ya'fur, see *Le Muséon*, LXVI, 307–10. The establishment of the correct date of this inscription must await the solution of the problem of the Ḥimyaritic Era.

mission was a solution of the Monophysite problem in Mundhir's realm, and the reference in the *Letter* (Jeffrey, p. 210) to "certain Himyarite believers" as having accompanied the Christian South Arabian ambassador is certainly significant. The Monophysites of Persia were living under difficult conditions, as is clear from Simeon's *Letter*. It would have been natural for the newly established Monophysite ruler of South Arabia to intercede on behalf of the Monophysites of Persia, particularly as relations between Ḥīra and Najrān had always been close. If this had been the object of his mission, then the South Arabian ambassador could have taken part in the negotiations at Ḥīra, in which Simeon and Abraham were involved.

Another question arises as to why negotiations with Mundhir had to pass through two stages, first at Ḥīra, then at Ramla.²⁶ It is possible that the ambassadors arrived in Ḥīra at a time when Mundhir was absent, so that he might have been only represented at that Conference. It is also likely that he broke off the Conference for some military necessity which arose in the South, or for diplomatic reasons in order to extract more favorable terms from the Byzantine ambassadors, particularly as a ransom for the two dukes was in question.

²⁶ Ramla is said by Simeon to have been at a distance of ten days' journey to the southeast of Ḥīra. It could not, then, have been in the Syrian desert, as is stated by Moberg (*Book*, p. xxxiv) and Vasiliev (*Justin I*, p. 280). Musil came nearer the truth when he made an attempt to identify a locality called al-Ḥēla, with Ramla, which he states is ten marches from Ḥīra. But it is much more likely that the vicinity of al-Ḥēla which according to him is called Ramla is the place mentioned in the *Letter*. Simeon, writing in Syriac, gave ḥāla or ḥīla ("sand") as the Syriac equivalent of Arabic Ramla in order to describe to those of his readers who did not know Arabic the meaning of the term Ramla; ḥāla, therefore, is expegetic not denominative, and is not a place name. Al-Ḥēla referred to by Musil must be a homophone of Syriac ḥīla; see A. Musil, *Northern Negd* (New York, 1928), p. 71.

Ramla, A.D. 524

The identification of the various personages who took part in the Conference makes possible their classification into groups which will reveal the complex nature of this Byzantine Embassy to Mundhir.

1. The Lakhmid Group: apart from Mundhir himself, there were Ḥajjāj (Aggaios) son of Qays, his companion, and Zayd, son of Ayyūb, the commander in charge of the military encampments.

2. The Byzantine Group was represented by two principal figures: Abraham and Sergius. Abraham was the main diplomat whose assignment was the conclusion of peace with Mundhir and the liberation of the two dukes, Timostratus and John,²⁷ an assignment which was successfully carried out.²⁸ Sergius was the ecclesiastical figure who accompanied Abraham; his

²⁷ Timostratus is a well-known figure for whom see *Pauly's Real-encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, VI A, cols. 1322-23; Vasiliev suggested the identification of John, son of Lucas, with the *dux* of Mesopotamia, who took part in the second Persian war of Justinian's reign; Vasiliev, *Justin I*, p. 278. There is, however, a better candidate for the identification, who is nearer in time to the events of A.D. 524, namely, John, the *dux* of Euphratensis mentioned by Malalas (*Chronographia*, p. 435), who took part in the punitive Roman expedition against Mundhir himself in A.D. 528.

²⁸ The various versions of the *Martyrium* give other assignments to Abraham; see Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 38, n. 5; according to *Cod. Paris. Graec.* 1537, Abraham was to conclude peace between Mundhir and the Roman Arabs; according to the Metaphrastic version, he was to conclude peace between Mundhir and the Arabs who were tributary to the Romans; according to *Cod. Paris. Graec.* 1454, the peace was to be concluded between Mundhir and the Christians in his realm. None of these versions states the real purpose of Abraham's mission, i.e., the liberation of the two dukes on which Nonnosus, Abraham's son, clearly informs. That Abraham interceded on behalf of the Christians is clear from the *Letter* of Simeon. What is not so clear is the reference to the "Roman Arabs"; the Metaphrastic version is more specific than *Cod. Paris. Graec.* 1537 in that it describes the Roman Arabs as tributary, ὑπόφοροι, and it is possible that Mundhir had molested these tributary Roman Arabs. Whoever these Arabs were, they could not have been the Ghassānids, who were not ὑπόφοροι, "tributaries," but σύμμαχοι, "allies." See also page 129.

assignment was probably to intercede with Mundhir on behalf of the Diophysites of Persia who had been persecuted or molested, and to help Abraham towards the fulfilment of the embassy's main objective.²⁹

3. The Persian Group: their presence at the conference of Ramla is undoubted, although who the representatives of the Persian King were is not clear.³⁰ Their dispatch was understandable, since the Persian king could not remain indifferent to a diplomatic conference which involved his neighbors the Byzantines and his vassals the Lakhmids.

4. The rest were ecclesiastics in Persia who were hoping for Byzantine intercession on their behalf: Isaac, Simeon, and John Mandinos. Isaac was the Diophysite ecclesiastic on whose behalf Abraham and Sergius interceded. John Mandinos was most probably his subdeacon. Simeon represented the Monophysites of Persia. Although it has been argued that the Nestorian Catholicus Shilas could not have attended the Conference of Ramla, there is no doubt that the Nestorians must have been represented at the Conference.

II

The *Martyrium* states briefly that Masrūq³¹ dispatched letters to Kawad

²⁹ It is possible that his dispatch to Mundhir was inspired by the fact that Sergiopolis, his see, was revered by the Arabs, among whom St. Sergius was the favorite saint. As bishop of this important metropolis, his intercession could carry weight with Mundhir, particularly as the latter had a Christian contingent in his army. The dispatch of the bishop of Sergiopolis might also argue that John, the captured *dux*, was indeed the *dux* of Euphretensis mentioned in Malalas, *Chronographia*, p. 435; the bishop of the same province was sent to intercede for the release of its *dux* and possibly to pay or contribute towards the payment of the ransom. Another bishop of Sergiopolis, Candidus, acted in a similar capacity in negotiating with Chosroes during the Second Persian War in A.D. 540; see Procopius, *History*, II, v. 28–33.

³⁰ Boissonade, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–39; *καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Περσίδος ἀποσταλέντων παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως Περσῶν.*

³¹ Masrūq is the name which the *Book of the*

and to Mundhir, announcing the massacre of the Christians in South Arabia, reminding the Persian king that his god "the father of the sun" was also the God of the Hebrews, and offering the Lakhmid king three thousand *denarii* as an inducement for persecuting the Christians.³² The Martyrologist piously adds that Divine Providence intervened very opportunely, inspiring Justin to send Abraham at that juncture, and that his timely dispatch to negotiate with Mundhir saved the Persian Christians from a fate similar to that of the South Arabians.

The accounts of this diplomatic transaction, which was to have such far-reaching consequences on Arab-Byzantine relations, are distressingly brief and undoubtedly selective. They receive little direct illumination from the South Arabian sources, since this decade or so of South Arabian history which preceded the massacres of Najrān is still shrouded in obscurity.³³ Such being the state of the sources, the only course open is the exploration of the various possible solutions through a re-interpretation of the already known evidence and the utilization of a newly recovered source which sheds light on the antecedents of Masrūq's letters.³⁴

The problems which Masrūq's letters raise may be stated as follows:

A. How is Masrūq's request to be interpreted? His proposal for the massacre of

Himyarites gives for the Jewish king of South Arabia, who has been favored with a multiplicity of names in the various sources, literary and epigraphic. I hope to discuss the problem of his name in a future publication.

³² Boissonade, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–38; see also notes 39, 43, and 44.

³³ For these events see, J. Ryckmans, *La persécution des chrétiens himyarites au sixième siècle* (Istanbul, 1956).

³⁴ For a description of this unpublished Karshūni manuscript and the collection of hagiographic texts of which it is a part, see G. Graf, *Oriens Christianus*, N.S., III (1913), 311–12, 323–24. As this manuscript is still unpublished, reference to it will not cite page and line; see also note 1.

the Christians has been understood to be an expression of religious fanaticism, but the proposal may admit of other explanations. The reference to the sun from a ruler who professed the Jewish faith is curious; a close examination of this reference to the sun could lead to a better understanding of the nature of Masrūq's proposal.

B. It is unlikely that the contents of the letters were limited to what the *Martyrium* relates. If so, what other proposals did the letters contain and what is the place of this diplomatic episode in the history of Ḥimyaritic-Lakhmid-Sasanid relations in the early part of the sixth century?

Masrūq, Mundhir, and Kawad

A. Masrūq's proposal to Mundhir concerning the fate of the Christians in the latter's realm has to be related to what he himself had done to the Christians of South Arabia. A correct interpretation of the massacres at Najrān should throw light on his proposal to Mundhir.

The motive may have been personal and the attribution of a personal motive depends partly on whether Masrūq was a Jew or a Judaizing Ḥimyarite. The *Nestorian Chronicle*³⁵ states that his mother was a captive Jewess from Nisibis bought by one of the Ḥimyaritic kings and that she instructed him in the Jewish faith. The Karshūni manuscript also has some relevant information, namely, that Masrūq had almost suffered death at the hands of the Ethiopians when they invaded South Arabia shortly before A.D. 524 and that his life was saved by a merchant from the tribe

of Nu'mān, who swore on his behalf that he was not Jewish but Christian. These two statements could support the view that the massacres of Najrān were inspired by some personal rancor on the part of Masrūq.

The *Letter* of Simeon contains some evidence which makes it possible to detect a non-personal motive behind Masrūq's action and which endows these massacres with a greater significance, involving not only South Arabia but also the Christian Roman Empire to the North. The *Letter* testifies to the presence of Jewish "priests" (rabbis) from Tiberias who are associated with Masrūq. Although their presence may be accepted as historical, the interpretation of the role they played in these events is not easy. A statement in the history of Malalas that Masrūq executed Byzantine merchants in his realm because Byzantium had oppressed its Jews affords a clue to the relation of the rabbis of Tiberias to the massacres.³⁶ Such information on the state of the Jews in the Byzantine Empire could have come from these rabbis who were familiar with the difficult conditions under which the Jews of the Empire were living. Consequently it could be argued that Masrūq's action against the Christian

³⁵ *Histoire Nestorienne, Patrologia Orientalis*, V, 331. Such biographical details are equally difficult to accept or reject. However, the fate which is alleged to have befallen Masrūq's mother can certainly be paralleled; after the destruction of Nehardea by Odenathus, the daughters of Samuel, the Amora of Nehardea, were captured and offered for ransom at Sapphoris in Palestine.

³⁶ Malalas, *Chronographia* (Bonn), p. 433; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. by Boor, p. 223; *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, trans. J.-B. Chabot (Paris, 1901), II, 183. According to Malalas the name of the Ethiopic king who avenged the massacre of the Roman merchants was Andas; this could suggest that Malalas might have made a chronological mistake and assigned to the sixth century events which had taken place much earlier; but history could have easily repeated itself as far as the imprisonment and massacre of Roman merchants by the consistently hostile Ḥimyarites are concerned. However, the ill-treatment of the Jews in the Roman Empire can be externally attested. Although the sources are silent on any ill-treatment immediately before A.D. 523-24, the year 507 witnessed an outbreak of violence against the Jews in Antioch and the burning of the synagogue at Daphne; see G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria* (Princeton, 1961), pp. 505-506; Simeon's recommendations in his *Letter* as to what Justin should do to the Jews of the Empire could suggest that such fate might have actually befallen them late in the reign of Anastasius; see Jeffrey, *Letter*, p. 215.

was taken for the sake of alleviating the plight of the Jews who were living in Byzantine territory, and that these massacres were both retaliatory and deterrent.

It is possible that Masrūq's action was inspired by either or both of these two motives. But there is room for a third which could be divined amidst the confusion and tendentiousness of all these sources. South Arabia had been the battleground of Judaism and Christianity for centuries, and its allocation to one or the other of these two religions could decide its political orientation in the history of the Near East with its two contending parties, Byzantium and Iran. Of the two faiths, Christianity happened to be the state religion of South Arabia's two traditional enemies, Byzantium and Ethiopia. Its steady advance in the Arabian Peninsula as well as the memories of a recent invasion of South Arabia by the Christian Negus of Ethiopia must have convinced Masrūq of the necessity of a definitive settlement of South Arabia's religious affiliation by the adoption of Judaism as the state religion and its establishment on a firm foundation. But the Christian communities in South Arabia could easily frustrate his plans. The Christians of Najrān posed the greatest threat, partly because their community was the best established and the strongest in South Arabia and partly because Najrān was strategically situated on the northern border of the Ḥimyaritic state, the focus of many routes which ran in all directions across the Peninsula.³⁷ The liquidation of the potentially dangerous community of Najrān became a political necessity. The massacres of Najrān could, consequently, be regarded

not as religious persecutions but as political executions; the sources do not omit to mention that on a number of occasions Masrūq ordered them only after the Najrānites had rejected his overtures and refused to apostasize.

The exploration of the various possible motives which could have impelled Masrūq to massacre the Christians of Najrān will now be drawn upon to elucidate the problems posed by his proposal that Mundhir should do likewise to his Christians.

The Karshūni manuscript provides some background material. It states that after Masrūq had gained the upper hand in South Arabia, he remembered his debt to the merchant from the tribe of Nu'mān³⁸ who had saved his life, and so he dispatched a letter to his former benefactor and his tribe together with a part of the spoils of Najrān. The three thousand *denarii* mentioned in the *Martyrium* could very well have been from the spoils of Najrān,³⁹ while Masrūq's friendship with the merchant could serve as a contact with the Lakhmid Mundhir and with the group

³⁸ The phrase "tribe of Nu'mān" occurs three times in the Karshūni manuscript to describe the tribal affiliations of three personages involved in the massacres of Najrān. There is no doubt that Nu'mān is none other than the famous Lakhmid king of Hira, Mundhir's father; although he died in A.D. 502, he survived in the consciousness of his people, who continued for some time to be known as the "tribe of Nu'mān," just as his capital Hira continued to be known as "the Hira of Nu'mān." One of the three personages mentioned in the Karshūni manuscript is ʿIliyā (Elijah), a martyred priest of Najrān who is described as belonging to the "tribe of Nu'mān"; the reference to him in *The Book of the Ḥimyarites*, p. cix, as the presbyter from the "Hira of Nu'mān," clinches the argument that the phrase in the Karshūni manuscript, "tribe of Nu'mān," is definitely a reference to the Lakhmid Arabs of Hira. On the appellation "House of Nu'mān" see the present writer in "Ḡhassan and Byzantium, a new *terminus a quo*," in *Der Islam*, XXXIII, Heft 3, p. 254.

³⁹ The three thousand *denarii* mentioned in the *Martyrium* may answer to the "Jewish gold" referred to in the *Letter of Simeon*; see Jeffrey, *Letter*, p. 215. The offer of these *denarii* could certainly cater to Mundhir's rapacious and predatory instincts which must have been well known to Masrūq.

³⁷ Najrān also separated Masrūq from Yathrib, the important center of Judaism in Ḥijāz. On Najrān, see the recent study by Madame N. Pigulevskaja in *JESHO*, Vol. II, Part 2, and Vol. IV, Part 1, pp. 113-30, 1-14.

to whom the merchant belonged. The statement in the *Nestorian Chronicle* that Masrūq's mother was a Jewess from Nisibis who had been captured and sold as a slave is not irrelevant in this context. It is possible that some Christians in Mesopotamia might have been involved in her capture. Interesting as this information is, it leaves Masrūq's letter and his proposal inspired by personal motives of gratitude and revenge.

Masrūq, probably, was concerned more about Judaism and the safety of the Jewish communities in Persia than about exterminating the Christians. During the reign of Kawad (A.D. 488–531) the Jews in Persia were living under a cloud. As recently as 520 their exilarch Mar Zutra II was executed and his body was suspended from a cross on the bridge of Maḥoza after he had led an unsuccessful armed rising. Masrūq would have known of these events through the Jews of Tiberias, since immediately after the execution of Mar Zutra his family fled to Palestine with his infant son, who became later the head of Sanhedrin.⁴⁰ That Masrūq was concerned for the Jews of Mesopotamia is clearly attested in the *Letter*; he calls on Mundhir to help the Jews in his dominions and promises him rewards.⁴¹ Furthermore, the Christian king of South Arabia whom Masrūq had just supplanted had already sent an ambassador to Mundhir and it is quite likely that among other things this ambassador might have sought from

Mundhir action against the Jews in concert with the action that had just been taken by the Christian Ethiopians against the Jews in South Arabia. Masrūq's proposal was intended to stop such an action on the part of Mundhir and to go further by turning the tables on the Christians in Mundhir's realm.⁴²

It remains to examine a third possibility. Although the massacres in South Arabia had apparently been committed with enough thoroughness to ensure the relative stability of the new religious and political system established by Masrūq, South Arabia was by no means safe from renewed efforts aiming at the restoration of Christianity. Ḥira was a base from which the Nestorians and later the Monophysites had penetrated the Arabian Peninsula and reached Najrān and Ḥaḍramawt. The elimination of this potentially dangerous Christian community was essential for the permanency of the newly established Judaism in South Arabia and for the survival of the new Jewish state. Viewed against this interpretation, Masrūq's proposal ceases to represent the revengefulness of a bloodthirsty religious fanatic such as the *Martyrium* and the *Letter* portray, but reflects the concern of a capable ruler who was alive to potential dangers and who was providing against all eventualities with great circumspection.

B. It has already been indicated that Masrūq's letter must have contained other proposals than the massacre of the Christians and this view could be supported by the following observations:

1. The only extant sources for this letter are ecclesiastical and they have, quite

⁴⁰ On Mar Zutra II, see S. Dubnow, *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes* (Berlin, 1926), III, 293–94. Critical opinion is divided on the chronology of Mar Zutra's exilarchate, which some assign to A.D. 512–20, others to the early part of Kawad's reign; Dubnow, *op. cit.*, p. 294, n. 1. See also two more recent discussions: O. Klima, "Mazdak und die Juden," *Archiv Orientalní*, XXIV (1956), 420–31; Geo. Widengren, "The Status of the Jews in the Sassanian Empire", *Iranica Antiqua*, I, 143–46; I am grateful to my friend and colleague, Professor Henry A. Fischel of Indiana University, for drawing my attention to these two articles.

⁴¹ Jeffrey, *Letter*, p. 209.

⁴² Mundhir's barbaric outbursts such as the sacrifice of captured Christians to his goddess al-'Uzzā (Venus) are attested in the sources, although they took place later than A.D. 524; for a recent study of the significance of human sacrifice among the pre-Islamic Arabs, which includes a reference to Mundhir, see J. Henninger, "Meschenopfer bei den Arabern," *Anthropos* (1958), pp. 734–38.

understandably, a narrowly focused point of view. An argument from analogy with reference to one of them, the *Martyrium*, may be adduced to fortify the suspicion that they are in fact selective in what they have chosen to include in their accounts. The main objective of Abraham's embassy is well known from the secular sources—the liberation of the two dukes, Timostratus and John; and yet the *Martyrium* has omitted reference to it. The *Martyrium*, then, could very well have been also selective in its narration of the contents of Masrūq's letter and thus it included only what was consonant with its character as a Martyrology.

2. The other proposals included in the letter can without much difficulty be inferred from a statement in the *Martyrium* itself, namely, the reference to the sun as a link between Judaism and Zoroastrianism.⁴³ Although the reference to the sun must be dismissed as propagandism on the part of Masrūq, since that orb or his progenitor has no place in the Jewish religious system,⁴⁴ the statement has great

value because of what it implies. Masrūq was trying to convince Kawad that their respective religious systems were alike and that both parties belonged to the same camp. Such a specious argument could not have deceived Kawad, who knew as well as Masrūq did that if they were in the same camp it was not so much because of a fictitious identity or similarity between Zoroastrianism and Judaism but because of their common opposition to another religion—Christianity—and what is more to the Empire which had adopted it as its state religion. That part of the letter left out by the Martyrologist could have been a proposal for an alliance against Byzantium.

3. That such might very well have been

identify the Iranian Ahura Mazda with the Hebrew Yahweh.

The worship of the sun was always considered a horror and an abomination from the point of view of Orthodox Judaism and was associated with the introduction of foreign cults; e.g., II Kings, 23:5; Jer. 7:18; Ezek. 8:16. So much is also clear from another part of Masrūq's letter itself where it is stated that he did not ask the Christians of Najran to deny God or to worship the sun or other heavenly bodies but only to deny Christ, Jeffrey, *Letter*, p. 205. But there are in the Old Testament complementary references to the sun, even a comparison of Yahweh Himself to the sun, Ps. 84:11.

Masrūq was careful, however, not to say that the sun was the Hebrew God; but the sun performed his function in the argument by enabling Masrūq to effect a transition from the sun to its correlative, the father of the sun, whom he could identify with Yahweh. The further identification of Yahweh with Ahura-Mazda through their respective relations to the sun and Mithras was not too difficult to make. The concept of Yahweh as Father (not the New Testament concept) is known to the Mishna and is used frequently in the Liturgy, and this could correspond, however superficially, to the Indo-Iranian Dyaus *Pitar* (Zeus *Pater*). It is, however, in the sense of Creator that "Father" must have been used by Masrūq; Yahweh was the Creator, and in Ps. 136:8, He is described as the Creator of the sun; so was Ahura Mazda. And if the institution of *Yotzer* is really due to the contact of Judaism with Mazdaism, then Masrūq's argument would have been particularly apposite.

Masrūq was not a theologian; the reasoning behind his simple statement must have been that of the learned rabbis from Tiberias. He merely presented the finished result in simple and significant terms which could appeal to a Persian king like Kawad, who toyed with Mazdaism and whose enemies were the Christian Romans, inimical since the fourth century to *Sol Invictus*.

⁴³ The reference to the sun and the "father of the sun" comes in the Masrūq's letter after he had appealed to Kawad to massacre the Christians. In *Cod. Paris. Graec.* 1537, it is thus expressed: εἰπὼν ἔχει τὸν Ἥλιον εὐμενῆ, καὶ τὸν πατέρα τοῦ Ἥλιου, ὃν ἔφασκεν θεὸν εἶναι τῶν Ἑβραίων, "saying that he (Masrūq) holds the Sun well-disposed and (also) the Father of the Sun, who, he said, is the God of the Hebrews." Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 37. The Metaphrastic version makes the Persian king the subject of the verb ἔχειν, expressing the clause in the optative: εἶγε τὸν Ἥλιον εὐμενῆ, φησί, βούλοιο ἔχειν καὶ τὸν αὐτοῦ πατέρα, ὡς ἐκείνος ἀπεφλύαρει τὸν τῶν Ἑβραίων θεόν, "if the (Kawad) would have the Sun well disposed and (also) the Father of the Sun who, he prated, is the God of the Hebrews," Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 38, n. 1. Perhaps the Metaphrastic version yields slightly better sense in that it makes the conditional clause express the reason which should induce Kawad to accede to Masrūq's request and massacre the Christians, namely, he would make his own god happy. Both versions, however, are agreed on Masrūq's reference to the "Father of the Sun" as the God of the Hebrews and the Persians.

⁴⁴ It is necessary, however, to examine Masrūq's curious statement in order to discover how he was able, even for the sake of diplomatic convenience, to

the purport of the letter could be inferred from a statement in Malalas,⁴⁵ namely that Masrūq started hostilities against Byzantium by his execution of its merchants in retaliation to Byzantine hostility towards the Jews. Masrūq's anti-Byzantine position is, thus, *testimonially* attested, and, after taking the initiative against Byzantium, it would have been natural for him to turn to the traditional enemies of Byzantium in the northeast—the Lakhmids and the Persians.

4. That Byzantium must have been involved in the calculations of the new ruler of South Arabia can also be inferred from the reaction of Abraham and Justin. The tidings from Arabia Felix of the Monophysite martyrdoms at Najrān would have touched the religious sympathies of Chalcedonian Justin, but it was the realization that a major imperial interest was in jeopardy that must have moved him to take action and contribute to the downfall of Masrūq.

Perhaps the foregoing analysis will have shown that Masrūq's letter represented a major diplomatic offensive which involved more important issues than the Martyrologist has chosen to relate. In spite of his victory in South Arabia, Masrūq was isolated politically and was surrounded by enemies on all sides. In addition to the two traditional enemies, Christian Ethiopia and Byzantium, there was Mundhir the Lakhmid against whom the South Arabian King Ma'd-Karib Ya'fur had campaigned only a few years before. But Mundhir was not implacable since no religious issue separated him from Masrūq, and hostility to Byzantium and Christianity presented a common ground upon which Masrūq, Mundhir, and his overlord the Persian king, Kawad, could meet. From Masrūq's point of view an alliance with Mundhir

and Kawad would afford protection to his co-religionists in Mesopotamia, would eliminate the danger of possible missionary activities from that region if its Christian communities were liquidated, and would consolidate his position militarily in the Arabian Peninsula. The proposed alliance would have been beneficial to both Mundhir and Kawad. Masrūq could hold Ethiopia, Byzantium's ally, at bay, and, what is more important, he could frustrate Byzantine and Ethiopic economic and trade policies which had been consistently directed towards the establishment of relations with India without the mediation of South Arabia or Persia. The sources attest⁴⁶ that Masrūq was aware of how detrimental to Byzantine economic interests he could be, and there is no doubt that the larger economic issues involving the restoration of the flow of trade to South Arabia were floating in his mind.⁴⁷

Although Masrūq's proposals could easily commend themselves to Mundhir, the latter was in no position to respond. His initial reaction was favorable, but it soon became clear to him that an alliance which entailed the persecution of the Christians was impractical and could compromise his own position. Part of his army was Christian, and Hīra, his capital, had a large Christian community, the 'Tbād. A taste of what could happen if he acceded to Masrūq's request was provided by the rebellious Christian chief in his army after Masrūq's letter had been read. Moreover, the prospect of concluding a peace with Byzantium involving a very high ransom for the two Roman dukes

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ See also Rubin, *ZJ*, p. 310 and the references in his notes (pp. 505–506) to the researches of Madame N. Pigulevskaia and Dr. W. Caskell in particular. That Masrūq was in touch with the Jewish community of Yathrib in Hijāz is a very attractive and persuasive hypothesis.

⁴⁵ See note 36.

must have made Masrūq's offer seem remote and hypothetical.

The reaction of Kawad to Masrūq's offer can only be guessed. It is possible that Masrūq's diplomatic offer took place at that period of Byzantine-Sasanid relations which followed the affair of the Hunnic chief Zilbig, when Kawad was in a friendly mood towards Byzantium, and so much so that he actually asked Justin to adopt his son Chosroes.⁴⁸

Simeon, Abraham, and Justin

Whatever political thinking there was behind the Byzantine decision to contribute to the Ethiopic expedition against South Arabia must have begun at Ramla by the two ecclesiastics, Simeon and Abraham.

Simeon's reaction was primarily that of an ecclesiastic concerned and grieved for the fate of his co-religionists in South Arabia. This is reflected in the measures he recommends and in his hopes that other ecclesiastics in the Christian world would remember the martyrs and write about them. But it is also possible that more was involved in Simeon's concern than commiseration for the Monophysites of South Arabia. Just as the Jews were looking towards the Arabian Peninsula and particularly to the Kingdom of the South as a refuge from the persecutions and the disabilities imposed on them by Persia and Byzantium, so were the Monophysites. Immediately after his accession, Justin reversed the ecclesiastical policy of his predecessor, Anastasius, disestablished Monophysitism, and expelled the Monophysite bishops from their sees. In Persia, too, the Monophysites had to face the hostility of the Nestorians who did not welcome the flight of the Monophysites from Byzantium into Persia and tried to

eject them from Persian territory. For these two reasons, South Arabia with its strong Monophysitic stronghold, Najrān, was of vital importance. The recent Ethiopic conquest of South Arabia had established not only a Christian ruler in that country but also a Monophysitic one; South Arabia became a new Monophysite state to which those persecuted in Byzantium and Persia could emigrate, as in fact many of them did; hence Simeon's anxiety that South Arabia should be restored to the fold.

Simeon's recommendations in his *Letter* are the best validation of this view and are the most telling indication that the issues were of a significance which transcended avenging the martyrdoms of Najrān and which involved Byzantium, Ethiopia, and the Arabian Peninsula. His recommendations reveal an ecclesiastical mind endowed with a rare political sense. Although a Monophysite, he was able to involve Chalcedonian Justin in his plans for the reclamation of South Arabia to Monophysitism, while the ecclesiastical strategy which he recommended to his fellow Monophysites finally influenced the course of events in Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Arabia:

1. As the Jews of Tiberias were living in Byzantine territory, Justin was in a very good position to contribute to the Christian cause in South Arabia; he could coerce them to bring pressure to bear on Masrūq and so to halt the persecutions; if they refused he could burn their synagogues and expel them from Palestine.

2. As for the Monophysite ecclesiastics in the Orient, they should write to Timotheus the Patriarch of Alexandria who in turn should ask the Negus of Ethiopia to invade South Arabia.⁴⁹

In making such recommendations,

⁴⁸ For this affair, see Vasiliev, *Justin I*, pp. 264-68; the chronology of the sequel to the exchange of letters between Kawad and Justin concerning the Hunnic chief is not clear.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey, *Letter*, p. 215.

Simeon could draw on past experience. When the Monophysites of Persia were experiencing difficult times, he called on the Emperor Anastasius to use his good offices with the Persian King Kawad, and on another occasion he invoked the aid of the Ethiopic Negus.⁵⁰

Abraham's reaction was similar but more complex. As a Christian presbyter he was no doubt concerned for the fate of the Najrānites, but as a specialist on Arabian affairs he was perturbed by the new developments in Arabia whose implications for Byzantium he quickly grasped. His father Euphrasius had struck a peace treaty with Kinda and had, thus, secured for Anastasius Inner Arabia and the other side of the Palestinian *limes*.⁵¹ But the fall of South Arabia to Judaism under a ruler hostile to Byzantium changed the balance of power in the Peninsula and created a situation actually and potentially dangerous for Byzantium.

The decision of Chalcedonian Justin to support a Monophysitic expedition against South Arabia now becomes intelligible. Abraham's analysis of the unfavorable developments in Arabia must have convinced the Emperor that action was necessary to restore the *status quo*. Chalcedonian Justin did not stint his support but extended it more substantially and effectively than Simeon had hoped or expected. This must have been done on the advice of Abraham, who saw the political gain Byzantium could score by actively participating in the war against Masrūq instead of a nominal and negative contribution such as Simeon had recommended in his *Letter*. Although Justin promised to send troops from the Blemyes and the Nobadae to swell the army of

the Negus, the Byzantine contribution was eventually limited to a fleet which transported the Ethiopic expeditionary force across the Red Sea to South Arabia.⁵² The *Martyrium* has preserved a valuable list—the catalogue of the ships which constituted the fleet and this catalogue gives an accurate measure of the nature and extent of the Byzantine contribution: fifteen from Ayla, twenty from Clysmā, seven from Iotabe, two from Berenice, seven from Pharsan, nine from Indica, in all, sixty ships.⁵³

In this joint Ethiopic-Byzantine amphibious operation, the Arab allies of Byzantium were conspicuous by their absence. Instead of calling on the Ghassānids to concert action with the Negus by a drive

⁵² The Arabic sources confirm the accounts of the *Martyrium* that the Byzantine contribution to the expedition consisted of a fleet; these sources have been analyzed by Nöldeke in *Die Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, p. 188. Bury doubts the exchange of letters referred to in the *Martyrium* which involved Justin, the Patriarch Timotheus, and the Negus, but his scepticism is unjustified. A statement in an independent source, Malalas, namely, that the Negus after his victory over Masrūq informed Justin of the outcome through Licinius, the Augustalis of Alexandria, cannot but imply that the two monarchs had been in correspondence; Malalas, *Chronographia*, p. 434; see also Vasiliev, *Justin I*, p. 299, n. 75.

⁵³ According to the *Martyrium*, the ships which transported the Ethiopic army belonged to Roman, Ethiopic, and Persian merchants. Most of the ships were undoubtedly Roman, as the ports from which they sailed clearly indicate. Those which sailed from Pharsan and Indica probably account for the reference in the *Martyrium* to Ethiopic and Persian merchantmen which may have been hired by Justin for the occasion; for the list see, Boissonade, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45. The Negus had ten more ships built which brought the number of the transports to seventy; the *Martyrium* refers to a strategic plan according to which a force was to be landed at a point on the southern coast of Arabia, somewhere in Ḥadramawt whence it was to attack Masrūq from the east while the Negus was to attack from the West; Boissonade, *op. cit.*, p. 45. For such a bold plan a fleet was obviously indispensable, but the plan was not carried out. However, for a successful disembarkation the Ethiopians had to land in force to overcome the resistance of a determined and desperate enemy, and for this a large number of transports was obviously essential; hence the value of the Byzantine contribution; cp. Rubin's views, *ZJ*, p. 307. For a discussion of the chronological problems of the Ethiopic invasion, see J. Ryckmans, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–21.

⁵⁰ Life of Simeon the Bishop, *Patrologia Orientalis*, xvii, pp. 143, 153.

⁵¹ On Euphrasius see note 4, and "Ghassan and Byzantium, a new *terminus a quo*," *Der Islam*, XXXIII, Heft, 3, pp. 235–38.

from Palestina Tertia to Najrān, Justin was forced to think of the distant Blemyes and the Nobadae. The nonparticipation of the Ghassānids in the South Arabian crusade is the best indirect evidence that, as good Monophysites, they had withdrawn from the service of Byzantium after the inauguration of a new religious policy by the House of Justin.

III

Perhaps the foregoing analysis has revealed with tolerable clarity the various phases of the complex diplomatic transaction which was centered at Ramla. It remains to measure its ramification and mark its significance.

For Mundhir, the Conference was the summit of a political career and the highlight of a remarkable reign which spanned the first half of the sixth century. He had inflicted an ignominious defeat on Byzantium by the capture of the two dukes, Timostratus and John, thus repeating on a smaller scale the humiliation to which Rome had been subjected in the third century when Valerian was captured by Shāpūr. Not only the Christian Roman Empire thought fit to court his friendship but also the rest of the Near Eastern States—Sasanid Persia, Ethiopia, and South Arabia. As this unusual diplomatic concourse reflected the importance of the Lakhmid king in the calculations of the neighboring powers, so did it reflect the central position of his capital Ḥīra in the history of pre-Islamic Arabia, the confluence of many religious and political currents, and the focus of diplomatic pressures and intrigues. The trans-Arabian route which connected Ḥīra with Najrān, less known than the more famous *via odorifera* of Western Arabia, reveals itself not only as a caravan route for cameleers to tread, but as an historic axis which connected the Ethiopic-Ḥimyaritic world with that of the

Lakhmids and the Sasanids, and around which revolved the history of political alignments, religious movements, military undertakings, and cultural interpenetrations.

For Abraham, the Conference of Ramla represented the major triumph of his diplomatic career in the service of Byzantium. By the liberation of the two dukes and the solutions of the difficulties which faced the various Christian groups in Mundhir's realm, he successfully accomplished the object of his mission. He was also able to prevent Mundhir from allying himself with the newly established dynasty of South Arabia, and thus left Masrūq isolated in the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. On his return to Constantinople he succeeded in persuading Justin to accept his analysis of potential developments in Arabia which could prejudice Byzantine imperial interest in the Red Sea area and the Arabian Peninsula. Byzantine participation in the Ethiopic amphibious operation against South Arabia owes much to Abraham's political grasp. Without his timely recommendations Byzantium might not have participated as it did, and the course of events in South Arabia could have taken a different direction. A few years later he was to render another service to Byzantium, when Kinda, strategically situated in the Arabian Peninsula, suddenly became restive and threatened the system of alliances which had secured for Byzantium its southern flank. After making two journeys into Inner Arabia, he finally succeeded in dissolving the anger of the Kindite Qays and effected a satisfactory settlement which restored the status quo.

The Conference of Ramla presents a clear picture of the working of ecclesiastical diplomacy just as the success of this diplomacy is the best measure of its efficacy. The main figures at Ramla were ecclesiastics, Abraham, Sergius, and Sime-

on, and ecclesiastics they remained when Imperial diplomacy later encompassed Egypt and Ethiopia and enlisted the services of Timotheus, the Patriarch of Alexandria. This ecclesiastical style in diplomacy reflects two significant facts: (1) since the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, religion has become the determining factor in the evolution of Near Eastern history, and it was only natural that its ministers should have been chosen as diplomatic representatives; (2) the interrelation of political and religious factors is established. The conversion of South Arabia to Christianity, desirable from the point of view of a pious Negus endowed with missionary zeal, was also essential for the stability of the new Ethiopic régime in that country, while the support rendered the Monophysites of Ethiopia by Chalcedonian Justin was principally due to the weight of Imperial interests which were at stake in that area of vital importance for Byzantine trade.

As the scene of diplomatic activity moved away from the center where it started to the wider periphery which encompassed Ctesiphon, Constantinople, Alexandria, Axum, and Najrân, the whole of the Near East became involved in the issues which had first been raised at the obscure Arabian locality of Ramla: (1) for the Christian Roman Empire, the fall of South Arabia to the Ethiopians signified the fulfilment of a missionary goal to convert that country to Christianity and the consummation of an imperial desire of long standing for the drawing of South Arabia into the Roman sphere of influence. Roman interests, economic and other, required for their well-being a friendly South Arabia, but what neither Augustus nor Constantius was able to achieve was finally accomplished by the ruler of Axum. (2) For the Ethiopians, the

conquest of South Arabia was a major military undertaking which successfully climaxed a series of expansionist attempts, aiming at the annexation of the Semitic homeland whence they had emigrated centuries before, and going back to the times of the Ethiopic king who ordered the inscription of the famous *Monumentum Adulitanum*. It was to the reign of Kaleb the first crusader and conqueror of South Arabia in A.D. 525 that the *Kebra Nagast* traces the division of the *oikoumenê* between Byzantium and Ethiopia. (3) In the history of the Jews between the rise of Christianity and the rise of Islam, the reign of Masrûq marks the last attempt on the part of the Jews of Talmudic times to establish a state of their own outside Palestine. The Ethiopic-Ḥimyaritic War presented the unique spectacle of an armed conflict between two *states* representing the two Biblical faiths of the Old and the New Testaments. Judaism lost to Christianity, and the latter, well established in South Arabia and steadily reinforced by three extrapeninsular currents from Ḥira, Axum, and Ghassânland, was able to give a stronger Christian tinge to the religious complexion of the Arabian Peninsula which was to last for over a century. (4) Neither the Ethiopians nor the Byzantines but the Arabs were those who were ultimately advantaged by the fall of Ḥimyar. For them the Ethiopic victory meant the elimination of the one powerful state in Arabia which had frustrated their military, economic, and political self-expression, and it was this Ethiopic rhythm introduced into the structure of Arabian history in the sixth century that deranged the hitherto familiar pattern of its evolution and created conditions which favored the elevation of Makka to that position of dominance which set the stage for the mission of Muḥammad and the rise of Islam.