

This is an extract from:

*The Crusades from the Perspective
of Byzantium and the Muslim World*

edited by Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh

published by

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection

Washington, D.C.

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Washington, D.C.

Printed in the United States of America

www.doaks.org/etexts.html

Byzantium through the Islamic Prism from the Twelfth to the Thirteenth Century

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The historiography of Muslim-Byzantine relations suffers from major gaps. The two major figures who have dealt with the subject are A. A. Vasiliev and Marius Canard. Vasiliev's monumental work, *Byzance et les Arabes*, concentrates on the military and political relations between the Byzantines and the Arabs. Marius Canard's publications are more varied; his bibliography includes pioneering works on various facets of the socio-economic, diplomatic, and cultural relations between the two empires.¹ Important gaps remain, however, concerning the life and conditions on the Arab-Byzantine frontier,² certain aspects of sociocultural and economic interactions,³ and the respective images of the two warring societies.

This study addresses the latter topic, the Islamic view of Byzantium during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The literature on this subject is still limited in spite of the growing number of published works on various aspects of East-West interactions and mutual perceptions during medieval times.⁴ Works instigated by both the debate on Orientalism and the activation of the Christian-Muslim dialogue have also tackled the issue of perception and representation, but only a few have handled it from the perspective of Arab-

¹ A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, French edition by H. Grégoire and M. Canard (Brussels, 1950), 2 vols. For the bibliography of Marius Canard, see M. Lefort, "Notes et documents: Index de l'oeuvre historique de Marius Canard," *Arabica* 22.2 (1975): 180–211, and F. Daftary, "Marius Canard (1888–1982): A Bio-Bibliographical Notice," *Arabica* 33 (1986): 251–62.

² Advances have been made in recent years on this subject; see, for instance, J. F. Haldon and H. Kennedy, "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organization and Society in the Borderlands," *Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'Etudes Byzantines, Académie Serbe des Sciences et des Arts* 19 (1980): 79–116; and C. E. Bosworth, "Byzantium and the Syrian Frontier in the Early Abbasid Period," in *Fifth International Conference on Bilād al-Shām: Bilād al-Shām during the Abbasid Period*, ed. A. Bakhit and R. Schick (Amman, 1991), 2:54–62.

³ The work of Marius Canard, in particular, "Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes," *DOP* 18 (1964): 35–56; "Quelques à côté dans l'histoire des relations entre Byzance et les Arabes," in *Studi orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1956), 98–119; and "Le cérémonial fatimide et le cérémonial byzantin," *Byzantion* 21 (1951): 355–420, has increased our knowledge in basic ways.

⁴ N. Daniel, *Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1960), with the new updated French version, *Islam et occident* (Paris, 1993); R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962); B. Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York, 1982).

Byzantine relations.⁵ Works on Byzantine perceptions of the Arabic-Islamic culture, people, and history remain few,⁶ while studies on Arab perceptions of Byzantium have witnessed a slight cumulative increase in recent years.⁷

By the eleventh century, a certain tradition depicting Byzantium and the Byzantines had been elaborated in the Arabic-Islamic sources.⁸ Later sources juxtaposed contemporary perceptions side by side with earlier views. A major characteristic of the Arabic-Islamic sources of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is an approach that favored compilation and systematization. As a result, in a wide variety of sources, there is often duplication and reproduction from earlier works.

In order to delineate the Muslim representation of Byzantium in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, I review a collection of important and well-defined prose sources from this period, including universal chronicles and local histories, geographical works and biographical dictionaries, as well as monographs on individuals and dynasties.⁹ I have avoided the genre of the hero cycles, such as *Sīrat ‘Antar* and *Sīrat Dhāt al-Himma*, because of the uncertainties concerning the identity of the authors, the date of composition, and the manuscript tradition.¹⁰ Not only are these texts filled with additions and interpolations, they also do not exist in critical editions. There is no doubt that once these obstacles are surmounted, the epics will provide a great amount of material relevant to the popular Arab medieval mentality.

⁵ On Orientalism, in addition to E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), see H. Djait, *Europe and Islam*, trans. from the French by P. Heinegg (Berkeley, 1985); and M. Rodinson, *La fascination de l’Islam: Les étapes du regard occidental sur le monde musulman* (Paris, 1980). On the Christian-Muslim dialogue, see W. M. Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London, 1991); and W. Bijlefeld, “Christian-Muslim Studies: Islamic Studies and the Future of Christian-Muslim Encounter,” in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Y. Haddad and W. Haddad (Gainesville, 1995), 13–40.

⁶ See, for instance, J. Meyendorff, “Byzantine Views of Islam,” *DOP* 18 (1964): 114–32; V. Christides, “The Image of the Pre-Islamic Arab in the Byzantine Sources” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1970); A. Ducellier, “Mentalité historique et réalités politiques: L’Islam et les Musulmans vus par les Byzantins du XIII^{ème} siècle,” *ByzF* 4 (1972): 31–63; S. Vryonis, “Byzantine Attitudes towards Islam during the Late Middle Ages,” *ByzMetabyz* 2 (1981): 263–86.

⁷ André Miquel’s seminal work, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu’au milieu du XI^{ème} siècle* (Paris–The Hague, 1976–80), 3 vols.; A. Shboul, *Al-Mas‘ūdī and His World* (London, 1979), and “Arab Attitudes toward Byzantium: Official, Learned, Popular,” in *Kathegtria: Essays Presented to Joan Hussey for Her 80th Birthday* (London, 1988), 111–29; Ṣo. el-Attar, “Contemplaciones iniciales sobre el tema bizantino en la cultura arabe,” *Byzantion Nea Hellas* 7–8 (Santiago, 1985): 209–26; as well as various articles published in *Graeco-Arabica*.

⁸ See N. M. El-Cheikh, “Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1992).

⁹ For a brief presentation of the 12th- and 13th-century Arabic sources, see M. H. M. Ahmad, “Some Notes on Arabic Historiography during the Zengid and Ayyubid Periods: 521/1127–648/1258,” in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (London, 1962), 79–97.

¹⁰ See H. T. Norris, *The Adventures of Antar* (Warminster, 1980), 4, who states that the *sīra* of ‘Antar was drafted between 1080 and 1400 but includes both earlier and later material. Bridget Connelly states, in *Arab Folk Epic and Identity* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1986), 8, that “the authorship and the date of these works are generally obscure.” Marius Canard, in a series of articles on *Dhāt al-Himma*, concluded that the epic is formed of two different cycles of different periods and origin and that “it is impossible to give an exact date for the composition of the romance.” See “Dhūl Himma,” *EP*, and “Delhemma: Epopée arabe des guerres arabo-byzantines,” *Byzantion* 10 (1935): 283–300. M. C. Lyons, in “The Crusading Stratum in the Arabic Hero Cycle,” in *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*, ed. M. Shatzmiller (Leiden, 1993), 147–61, states that the literary construction of the cycles “represents oral accretive tradition, based on the manipulation of narrative standard ingredients.” See also the paper by M. C. Lyons, in this volume.

It is necessary to take into account the limitations of such an approach. One such factor is that Arab culture, during these centuries, was mainly a palace culture.¹¹ We see the age through the eyes of the senior bureaucrats and of the ‘*Ulamā*’ who had drawn close to the centers of power.¹² The information and views are thus limited socially. Another important consideration to keep in mind is that although the individual contemporary authors could emphasize a particular aspect of Byzantium, or bring out a new facet, they still conveyed entrenched images extant in a wide variety of sources. I try to distinguish between those authors who related firsthand accounts, having visited Byzantine territories during this period, and those who relied solely on secondhand information, whether oral or written. The present task is thus to look at the texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in order to detect continuities and changes in these depictions, in light of the new historical context created by the onslaught of the Crusades.

The period of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was a crucial epoch for the Muslim world, which was in a state of political fragmentation. Syria was divided among rival Turkish *amirs* who were squandering their resources in internal wars, while Fatimid Egypt was trying to maintain its hold on Palestine. This political disintegration prevented any viable resistance to the Crusades, especially given the ideological division that split loyalties between the Abbasid Caliphate and the Fatimid Imamate.¹³ The Arab authors were there to witness the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders and the establishment of various Frankish principalities. However, many authors were also there to watch the Zankid reconquest, the triumph of the armies of Saladin, and the consolidation of the Sunni restoration.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were also the period during which the Byzantine Empire was politically and militarily weak. Following a brilliant period in the late tenth and the early eleventh century, disintegration set in. Although Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) strengthened the empire, his achievements and those of his successors were not enduring and were followed by a collapse of the Byzantine state.¹⁴

What distinguishes this period from earlier ones, therefore, is that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed the gradual decline of the Byzantine state contrasted with the establishment of the Crusaders in the East. During this period, the Byzantines alongside the Muslims became the target of the Crusaders’ offensive. The appearance of these Christians with an agenda and a mission so completely different from the traditional Byzantine policies and outlook was bound to affect the Islamic image of Byzantium. This study aims at delineating this multifaceted image by tracing both the recurrent traditional themes as well as new representations that arose in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The main aspects relate to the Muslim appreciation of Byzantine ori-

¹¹ See N. Faris, “Arab Culture in the Twelfth Century,” in *A History of the Crusades: The Impact of the Crusades on the Near East*, ed. K. M. Setton et al. (Madison, Wisc., 1985), 5:3–32.

¹² T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, 1994), 191–92.

¹³ For an overview of the situation in Syria during the 12th century, see N. Elisséeff, “The Reaction of the Syrian Muslims after the Foundation of the First Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem,” in Shatzmiller, *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria* (as in note 10), 162–72.

¹⁴ G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), 320 ff.

gins, beauty, artistic skills, knowledge, character and morals, as well as the Muslim authors' observations concerning the Byzantine territory, particularly Constantinople.

The Byzantines are still referred to in our texts as *al-Rūm*. Sometimes, especially during the early period of the Crusades, the term *al-Rūm* was also used to refer to the Franks. Upon the arrival of the Crusaders, the Arabs tended to confuse them with the Byzantines. Mostly, however, and especially with time, the new term *al-Ifranġ* was coined for the Franks, reflecting an emerging distinction between Byzantines and Crusaders. It did not take long for a new image of the *Ifranġ*, dissociated from that of the Byzantines, to emerge. However, both the terms *Ifranġ* and *Rūm* were at times used to mean Christian, in general.

Banū al-Aṣfar is another name that continues to be used by Arab authors in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to refer to the Byzantines.¹⁵ Arab Muslim authors continue to trace the origins of the *Rūm* back to Abraham and attempt to explain the reference *Banū al-Aṣfar*. Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), in his famous dictionary *Lisān al-'Arab*, defines the *Rūm* as a known people who are traced back to Esau, son of Isaac.¹⁶ Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) repeats information found in earlier sources which trace the *Rūm* mainly through Esau, son of Isaac, son of Abraham. This same Esau, in one story, married Basma, daughter of Ishmael, and since Esau was blond, his wife brought into the world *al-Rūm*.¹⁷ Hence the *Rūm* were called *Banū al-Aṣfar* because they were blond.¹⁸ Similarly, the twelfth-century geographer Muḥammad al-Zuhri traces the origin of the *Rūm* back to Abraham and his son Isaac, making a clear distinction between the *Rūm* and the *Yunāniyyūn* (ancient Greeks).¹⁹

Another continuity with the earlier image of the Byzantines is connected with their physical beauty. The cosmographer al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1285) states that the Byzantines are mostly white, with blond hair and sturdy bodies.²⁰ Similarly, the geographer Ibn Sa'īd (d. 678 or 685/1274 or 1286) stresses the whiteness and blondness of the Byzantines, stating that the inhabitants of the sixth climate are characterized by extreme whiteness, blue eyes, and blond hair and they often have freckles on their faces.²¹ These physical attributes were highly valued, as can be deduced from various *adab* works and special manuals, which delineate the prevalent Arab typology of beauty.²²

The Arab authors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries reiterated the now entrenched belief of the Byzantines' unequalled skill in building, craftsmanship, and paint-

¹⁵ Ignaz Goldziher has a brief discussion of the various colors the Arabs used to refer to other people in *Muslim Studies*, trans. by C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (London, 1967), 2:243–45.

¹⁶ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut, 1992), 12:258.

¹⁷ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān* (Beirut, 1957), 3:9. See also Shams al-Dīn al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr fī 'ajā'ib al-birr wa akhbār al-baḥr*, ed. A. Mehren (Leipzig, 1923), 258.

¹⁸ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 3:98.

¹⁹ Muḥammad al-Zuhri, *Kitāb al-jughrāfiyā*, ed. M. Ḥajj Sadok, *BEODam* 2 (1968): 201.

²⁰ Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī, *Athār al-bilād wa akhbār al-'ibād* (Beirut, n.d.), 530.

²¹ Ibn Sa'īd, *Kitāb al-jughrāfiyā*, ed. I. al-'Arabī (Beirut, 1970), 177.

²² Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, *Jamāl al-mar'a 'inda al-'Arab* (Beirut, 1969), 67–68. The beauty of the Byzantines is related in earlier Arabic sources, such as Ṣā'iq al-Andalusī (d. 426/1070), *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* (al-Najaf, 1967), 13.

ing. Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217), the Andalusian traveler whose *riḥla* (voyage) took place between 1183 and 1185, confirms, through his personal observations, the Byzantines as supreme builders. He includes his own original descriptions but also reproduces older traditions. Having visited the Citadel in Cairo, Ibn Jubayr states that the stones of the surrounding trench are carved with a talent that makes it a lasting wonder. This was the handwork of the Byzantine captives “who are irreplaceable for such building skills.”²³ Ibn Jubayr stresses these Byzantine skills again in the city of Ḥarrān, where he marvels at the main mosque and particularly one of its great domes (*qubba*), built by the *Rūm*.²⁴ Upon seeing the Great Mosque of Damascus, Ibn Jubayr repeats the story found in the geography of al-Maḥdī (d. 390/1000) to the effect that the Umayyad caliph ordered the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople to send him twelve thousand artisans to help with the mosaic work.²⁵ Al-Idrīsī, who completed his work at the court of King Roger II of Sicily in 548/1154, also describes the inimitable dome of the Cordoba mosque decorated with colored and golden mosaics sent to Caliph al-Nāṣir by the ruler of the “great Constantinople.”²⁶ The Arabic sources are tireless, indeed, in their admiration of Byzantine craftsmanship and artwork: Al-Harawī (d. 611/1215), whose descriptions are based on his own travels, states that there are in Constantinople bronze and marble statues, columns, and marvelous talismans “the like of which are not to be found in the lands of the Muslims.”²⁷

Not only are the Byzantines great builders, their painting skills are unequaled. Ibn Jubayr, mentioning the pre-Islamic Byzantine church of Mary in Damascus, describes it as being magnificently constructed, housing “marvelous paintings that bewilder the mind and transfix the gaze. It is a marvelous spectacle.”²⁸ Echoing a long tradition dating back to al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 254/868) and Ibn al-Faqīh (d. 291/903), which saw the Byzantines as “the most skilled nation in painting,”²⁹ al-Qazwīnī praised the Byzantines using very similar words, stating that “they have in painting great skills; they paint the human being laughing or crying, happy or sad.”³⁰ This view is reiterated by the physician bibliographer Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a (d. 668/1270) in *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*, which includes a reference found in earlier texts to a correspondence between the caliph of Cordoba, al-Nāṣir ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (300–350/912–961), and the Byzantine emperor in the year 337/948. The correspondence was accompanied by gifts that included the book of Di-

²³ Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, ed. Ḥussayn Naṣṣār (Cairo, 1955), 20.

²⁴ Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 233.

²⁵ Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 249. Al-Maḥdī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma‘rifat al-aqālīm*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1967), 157.

²⁶ Muhammad al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-aḥqāq* (Leiden, 1970–84), 5:576.

²⁷ Abū Bakr al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishānāt li ma‘rifat al-ziyārāt*, ed. J. Sourdel-Thomine (Damascus, 1953), 56.

²⁸ Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 272.

²⁹ The famous passage in al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-akhbār wa kayfa taṣiḥḥ*, text and translation by C. Pellat in *JA* 255 (1967): 86: “Their painters paint human beings without leaving any detail out, for the Byzantine painter is not satisfied with the painting until he turns the figure into a young man, a middle-aged man, or an old man; he then makes the figure handsome and charming and then makes it laughing or crying; the painter even manages to distinguish in his painting between on the one hand a sarcastic smile and a shy one and on the other hand between gaiety and the laughter of a delirious person.” The passage is reproduced almost identically in Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1885), 136.

³⁰ Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 531.

oscorides, painted in the “amazing Byzantine style” (*al-ṭaṣwīr al-rūmī al-‘ajīb*).³¹ The twelfth- and thirteenth-century sources, therefore, by a combination of personal observation and hearsay or copying, persevere in the earlier idealization of the Byzantines as master artists and craftsmen.

The later sources thus reproduce positive comments concerning the Byzantines’ origins, beauty, and artistic skills found in the earlier Arabic-Islamic sources. Absent, however, from our texts is the discussion of Byzantine versus Greek learning that used to permeate earlier texts. The texts of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries include a discussion concerning the role of the Byzantines in the scientific and philosophical knowledge passed on to the Muslims. At issue was the extent to which the Byzantines should be credited for the learning of the ancient Greeks. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century sources do not emphasize these points of contention, limiting themselves to a few references that confirm the Byzantines in their role as repositories of ancient Greek knowledge. The Egyptian Ibn al-Qifṭī (d. 646/1248) copies the story found in the tenth-century *al-Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, who includes an anecdote concerning Caliph al-Ma’mūn’s request of ancient books found in *bilād al-Rūm*.³² The Damascene historian al-Jazarī (d. 793/1338) mentions an original story that has the merchant ‘Abdallāh describing the libraries of Hagia Sophia, where one can find “all the sciences” and books embodying the names of cities, rivers, and sources.³³ Otherwise, the debate on Byzantine knowledge, a salient theme of the earlier centuries, is dropped from the later sources. Of course, much of the previous discussion was included in a general reappraisal of the “merits of various nations,” within the context of the *Shu‘ūbiyya* controversy opposing Persians and Arabs within the Muslim empire.³⁴ With this literary controversy now long gone, a number of related themes no longer appear in our later texts.

The real rupture from the earlier image appears, however, in conjunction with the character and morals of the Byzantines. While the earlier sources are replete with accusations of sexual immorality, lack of generosity, treachery, and women’s improper behavior, the twelfth- and thirteenth-century sources surprise us by their silence. The absence of such criticisms constitutes a significant breach, since the earlier negative image concentrated primarily on the character, morals, behavior, and customs of the Byzantines. Al-Qazwīnī alone has a word on their character, and it is positive: “they are playful and joyful.”³⁵ What a complete turnabout from the earlier Arabic sources, which, if they praised the Byzantines for their beauty and artistic skills, reserved all their animosity and vehemence for their character and morals. By eliminating such comments, the texts of

³¹ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*, ed. N. Riḍā (Beirut, 1965), 493–94. The reference is to the *De materia medica* of Dioscorides. An analysis of the paintings of an Arabic Dioscorides manuscript dating from 1229 is found in R. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva, 1977), 67–74.

³² ‘Alī b. al-Qifṭī, *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā’*, ed. J. Lippert (Leipzig, 1903), 29–30.

³³ Al-Jazarī, *Jawāhir al-sulūk fī al-khulā‘ā’ wa al-mulūk*, based on the Paris manuscript no. 6730, fols. 91–94. The translation of the pertinent sections on Constantinople is found in M. Izeddin, “Un texte arabe inédit sur Constantinople byzantine,” *JA* 246 (1958): 453–57. Jean Sauvaget has analyzed the content in *La Chronique de Damas d’al-Jazari* (Paris, 1949).

³⁴ H. T. Norris, “Shu‘ūbiyyah in Arabic Literature,” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Abbasid Belles-Lettres* (Cambridge, 1990), 31–47.

³⁵ Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 530.

the twelfth and thirteenth centuries end by providing a less variegated, more consistent, and clearly more positive image of the Byzantines.

In addition to our texts' elaboration on various facets of the Byzantine persona, twelfth- and thirteenth-century Arabic Islamic sources on Byzantium include physical descriptions of *bilād al-Rūm* and especially of Constantinople. Here again the surviving earlier view is juxtaposed side by side with the evolving image that reflects the new contemporary situation.

Bilād al-Rūm, that is, the Byzantine Empire, continues to be highly praised. Exaggerating its geographical extent, al-Zuhrī states that *bilād al-Rūm* extends from Constantinople in the East to Barcelona in the West.³⁶ Yāqūt gives its frontiers: They have the Turks, Khazars, and Rus on the north and east, in the south their limits are *al-Shām* and Alexandria, and in the west they border the sea of *al-Andalus*.³⁷

Al-Qazwīnī states that *bilād al-Rūm* is a great country and kingdom. The reason for its survival, he claims, lies both in its great distance from *bilād al-Islām* and in the strength of its rulership. Its survival, as opposed to the disappearance of the great Persian Empire, was predicted by the Prophet Muhammad, who said: "For Persia no thrusts and no Persia after that; whereas *al-Rūm* with the many horns, as a generation passes, another one succeeds it."³⁸

One of the distinguishing characteristics of *Bilād al-Rūm* in our sources is its high fertility. Al-Qazwīnī states that "it is a great land, most fertile," and al-Zuhrī mentions that *bilād al-Rūm* is a fertile land, as are all the other cities of *al-Rūm*, which abound in crops, cattle, fruit, and vineyards.³⁹ The Aleppine historian Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-'Adīm (d. 660/1262) corroborates these authors in his statement about Aleppo: "Aleppo is a country scarce in fruits, vegetables, and wine, except for what it imports from *bilād al-Rūm*."⁴⁰ Among the most important cities are Amorium and especially Antioch, which al-Zuhrī describes as one of the greatest cities of *bilād al-Rūm*.⁴¹ Topping the list, by far, however, was Constantinople.

The Arab authors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries called the Byzantine capital *al-Qusṭantīniyya*; they are nevertheless also aware of the site's old name, Byzantium. Yāqūt relates that Constantinople was built by one of their kings who is referred to as *Buzanṭī*.⁴² Both Ibn al-Athīr and Yāqūt mention a third name, that of Istanbul.⁴³ Gathering their information from earlier Arabic sources, our authors underline the historical importance of the transfer of the Roman capital from Rome to Constantinople in the fourth century A.D. They also stressed the watershed represented by both Christianiza-

³⁶ Al-Zuhrī, *Kitāb al-jughrāfiyā*, 228.

³⁷ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 3:98.

³⁸ Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 530.

³⁹ Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 530, and al-Zuhrī, *Kitāb al-jughrāfiyā*, 228.

⁴⁰ Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughiyat al-ḥalab fī tārikh ḥalab*, ed. S. Zakkār (Damascus, 1408 AH), 1:61.

⁴¹ Al-Zuhrī, *Kitāb al-jughrāfiyā*, 239.

⁴² Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 3:98.

⁴³ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārikh* (Beirut, 1979), 1:330, and Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 4:247. Istanbul was mentioned early on by al-Mas'ūdī in *al-Tanbīh wa al-ishrāf*.

tion and the establishment of the empire's capital in Byzantium and connected the two events with Constantine the Great. Yāqūt, for instance, states that Constantine the Great moved to Byzantium and built a wall around it and called it *Qusṭantīniyya*, and it is their *dār al-mulk* (ruling capital) until today.⁴⁴ Similarly, the geographers Ibn Sa'īd, al-Zuhrī, and al-Dimashqī confirm that Constantinople was built by Constantine, who made it the city of the caesars.⁴⁵

Constantinople occupied a unique place in the Byzantine Empire, well reflected traditionally in the Muslim sources, which continued to confirm its exceptional political, economic, and cultural importance despite the historical developments and mutations it underwent during this period. The Muslim authors of the thirteenth century were aware of the two momentous events in the recent history of the city, namely, the massacre of the Latins in 1182 and the conquest of the city by the Latins in 1204. Concerning the events of 1182, Ibn Jubayr relates the following confused and inaccurate story:

The report had it that the Sovereign of Constantinople had died, leaving his kingdom to his wife and young son. But his cousin usurped the throne, killed the widow, and seized the boy. The usurper fell in love with the boy's sister, who was famed for her beauty. Yet he could not marry her since it was forbidden for the *Rūm* to take their kinswomen in marriage. Impetuous love, blind and deafening desire . . . impelled him to take her and go to Prince Mas'ūd, Sovereign of Konia. . . . The two of them embraced Islam . . . and got married . . . then with the backing of Muslim armies he entered Constantinople, slaying some fifty thousand of its inhabitants. The Muslims seized Constantinople, and all its money was transported to Amir Mas'ūd. . . . This conquest is one of the signs of the Hour, *ashrāt al-sā'a*.⁴⁶

Ibn Jubayr, here, has the Muslims conquering Constantinople in 1182. Of course, no Muslim army captured Constantinople until the Ottoman conquest of 1453, and it was the Latin inhabitants who were slaughtered by the Byzantines. As for the last phrase on *ashrāt al-sā'a*, it belongs to the Muslim apocalyptic literature that developed very early on in connection with the military expeditions against the Byzantine capital in the seventh and eighth centuries. Numerous traditions going back to the Prophet Muhammad made its conquest one of the six portents of the Hour signaling the approaching end of the world.⁴⁷ These traditions, found in the earliest compilations, are naturally included in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts, albeit in an altered form at times.

The text of Jamāl al-Dīn b. Wāṣil (d. 697/1298) provides the following significant

⁴⁴ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 4:247.

⁴⁵ Ibn Sa'īd, *Kitāb al-juġhrāfiyā*, 184; Muhammad al-Zuhrī, *Kitāb al-juġhrāfiyā*, 234; and al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, 259.

⁴⁶ Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 327–29. Andronikos was the cousin of Emperor Manuel, and he did kill his widow as well as the young emperor Alexios II. However, Andronikos did not fall in love with his cousin, although he was famous for his adventurous love affairs. The girl he married, after he became emperor, was the thirteen-year-old widow of Alexios II, daughter of Louis VII.

⁴⁷ See M. Canard, "Les expéditions arabes contre Constantinople dans l'histoire et la légende," *JA* 208–9 (1926): 61–121; and S. Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim–Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources," *JRAS*, 3d ser., 1 (1991): 173–207.

alteration: “A letter from Nūr al-Dīn to al-Mustaḍīr states: Constantinople and Jerusalem are both in the gloom of deep darkness, waiting for the crow of familiarity. God the all-high, by his generosity will bring close the harvest of both conquests for the Muslims.”⁴⁸ The addition of Jerusalem to the well-known tradition on the conquest of Constantinople, coinciding as it did with the period of the Crusades, was not accidental. This was a new development that had been absent in the earlier sources. The resurgence of the idea of the sanctity of Jerusalem in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Muslim texts is directly linked to its occupation by the Crusaders. Jerusalem’s new situation made it the target of the military campaigns and the main focus of the political and ideological propaganda of the Muslims, rendering it also a main subject of the literature.⁴⁹

The novel emphasis on Jerusalem is, indeed, also reflected in the Qur’anic exegetical literature of this period. The Shiite exegete Abū ‘Alī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153) explains the opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm* in a totally new way. These verses read: “The Greeks (*al-Rūm*) have been vanquished in the nearer part of the land; and after their vanquishing, they shall be victors in a few years . . . and on that day the believers shall rejoice in God’s help.”⁵⁰ Al-Ṭabarsī states that “the believers will rejoice for the expulsion of the Persians from Jerusalem and not for the Byzantine victory over the Persians.”⁵¹ The conquest of Jerusalem, not of Constantinople, now became the crowning achievement of the Muslim conquests. Constantinople was relegated, for a while and in certain texts, notably religious ones, to a secondary position, having lost its *place d’honneur* in the new discourse that reflected the new prevailing conditions in the Near East.

As for the conquest of Constantinople in 1204, Ibn al-Athīr relates the political circumstances that led to the Latin takeover of the city, describing how the Franks took the money and gold of the churches, even the adornments on the crosses, icons, and Bibles.⁵²

The Franks in the city, who were numerous, around thirty thousand . . . , rose, with the help of the Franks who were besieging the city, throwing fire, time and again, thus burning one-fourth of the city. They entered the city and ravaged it for three days, killing and plundering. The Byzantines were all either killed or became destitute. A group of Byzantine aristocrats sought refuge in Haghia Sophia but were followed by the Franks, and although a number of priests, monks, and abbots came out, begging them with the crosses and Bibles they were carrying, the Franks disregarded them, killing them all and plundering the church.⁵³

The Arabic sources are thus aware of the systematic pillaging of the city. In addition to the killings and plundering of treasures, Ibn al-Athīr points to the most striking act, the plundering of Hagia Sophia. He also explains how Baldwin of Flanders was crowned

⁴⁸ Jamāl al-Dīn b. Wāṣil, *Mufarrij al-kurūb fī akhbār banī ayyūb*, ed. J. al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (Cairo, 1953), 1:253.

⁴⁹ E. Sivan, “The Sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam,” in *Interpretations of Islam: Past and Present* (Princeton, 1985), 75–106. Kāmil al-‘Asalī lists 45 manuscripts of the 12th and 13th centuries dealing with the *faḍā’il al-quds* literature in his *Makhtūṭāt faḍā’il bayt al-maqdis: Dirāsāt wa bibliūghrāphyā* (Amman, 1981).

⁵⁰ *Qur’ān*, 30:1–5; trans. in A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford, 1964).

⁵¹ Abū ‘Alī al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma’ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Beirut, 1961), 19–25:7.

⁵² Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 12:190.

⁵³ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 12:191.

in Constantinople, although the *Rūm* never recognized his authority, making Nicaea the provisional capital of the Byzantine Empire, headed by al-Ashkarī, the Lascarid.⁵⁴ Ibn al-Athīr is not alone in grasping the consequential political developments that had occurred in the Byzantine Empire. Yāqūt likewise states that “today, [Constantinople] is in the hands of the Franks.”⁵⁵ Ibn Wāṣil also mentions the conquest of Constantinople by the Latins: In this year (600) the *al-Ifranj* left their lands in great crowds and conquered it. Constantinople remained with the *al-Ifranj* until 660, when the *Rūm* took it back.⁵⁶ Thus the Arab authors were not only aware of the conquest of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204, but appreciated the magnitude of the event.

What was the Arabs’ image of Constantinople during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when so much had come to pass? Statements in our sources confirm earlier descriptions of the greatness and uniqueness of Constantinople. Al-Harawī states that “Constantinople is a city greater than its reputation,”⁵⁷ and al-Qazwīnī proclaims that “Nothing was ever built like it, neither before nor after,” and even “if it is no longer that way . . . it remains a great city.”⁵⁸ Yāqūt states that stories concerning Constantinople’s greatness and beauty abound.⁵⁹

Such remarks were not unique to the Arab authors. Western authors were similarly bedazzled by the great city. Geoffrey de Villehardouin, writing on the conquest of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204, stated: “Many of our men, I may say, went to visit Constantinople, to gaze at its many splendid palaces and tall churches and view all the marvelous wealth of a city richer than any other since the beginning of time.”⁶⁰ However, the Western image of Constantinople, during the period of the Crusades, contains inherent negative components well reflected in Odo of Deuil who, after praising Constantinople’s richness and glory, draws a pejorative conclusion: “In every respect she [Constantinople] exceeds moderation; for just as she surpasses other cities in wealth, so too does she surpass them in vice.”⁶¹

Unlike the Western view of Constantinople, which moves from praise to denigration, the Arabic texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries rarely, if ever, include negative comments. If earlier Arabic texts, dating from the ninth and tenth centuries, had accused Constantinople of arrogance and pride,⁶² twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts describe the city’s opulence without judgmental undertones. The only outright negative comments found in our sources are repetitions of earlier traditions which point to the city’s

⁵⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 12:192.

⁵⁵ Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-buldān*, 4:247.

⁵⁶ Ibn Wāṣil, *Mufarrij al-kurūb*, 3:160.

⁵⁷ Al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt*, 57.

⁵⁸ Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 603.

⁵⁹ Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-buldān*, 4:247.

⁶⁰ Joinville and Villehardouin, *Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. M. R. B. Shaw (New York, 1984), 76.

⁶¹ Trans. in J. P. A. Van der Vin, *Travelers to Greece and Constantinople* (Istanbul, 1980), 2:519. This negative view reaches its highest level after the capture of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204. See A. Ducellier, “Une mythologie urbaine: Constantinople vue d’Occident au Moyen Age,” *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome: Moyen âge et temps modernes* 96 (1984): 405–24.

⁶² See, for instance, the early 10th-century geographer Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān*, 146: “And so God promised her [Constantinople] suffering before the Last Judgment and said: By my power and majesty I will remove your jewels, your silk, your wine, and your bread, and will leave you with no song to sing.”

wretchedness: Ibn al-‘Adīm cites a *ḥadīth* from Abū Hurayra: “Four cities in this world are from paradise: Mecca, Madīna, Jerusalem, and Damascus. And four cities from fire: Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, and Ṣan‘ā’.”⁶³ This *ḥadīth* is also found in the bibliographical work of the Damascene Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176), although slightly modified: the four cities of paradise are Mecca, Madīna, Jerusalem, and Damascus; and the four cities of hell are Constantinople, Ṭabariyyā, Antioch, and Ṣan‘ā’.⁶⁴

Aside from this tradition, the writings on Constantinople that we find in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Arabic-Islamic texts describe the Byzantine capital either in neutral or positive terms. Politically, economically, and culturally, the Arab authors still hold Constantinople in the highest regard. Al-Idrīsī, writing in the mid-twelfth century, before the Latin conquest of the city, states: “Constantinople is prosperous, having markets and merchants, and its people are affluent.”⁶⁵ This impression of the city as prosperous and economically active continues to permeate our sources in the thirteenth century, that is, after the disaster of 1204. Al-Jazarī mentions the arrival of the merchant ‘Abdallāh b. Muhammad in Damascus in 692/1293.

‘Abdallāh had lived in Constantinople for twelve years during the reign of Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328), having left Syria during the Mongol invasions. Asked by the father of the narrator whether it was permissible for a *ḥajj*, pilgrim, to establish himself among the *Ifriyanj* (here in the sense of Christian), the merchant answered: “My brother, if I were to tell you about this city, you will understand better, and you will realize that those who inhabit it have nothing to fear. They can do whatever they please and at the same time make considerable profit.”⁶⁶ Asked to describe it, he said:

It is a great city, comparable to Alexandria, on the seashore, and it takes one morning to cross it from end to end. There is a place as large as two-thirds of Damascus, surrounded by walls with a gate, which is reserved especially for the Muslims to live in. There is equally a similar place for the Jews. . . . There are one hundred thousand minus one churches. . . . When I asked I was told that the ruler of Constantinople had an equal number of kings at his service, each with his own church. He completed the number by building the Great Church. . . . It is one of the most considerable and marvelous buildings that we can see.⁶⁷

‘Abdallāh lived in Constantinople after the Byzantine restoration in 1261, when the city had regained some of its earlier opulence. Having made an extended stay in the city, he had the time and the opportunity to experience it as a reality. ‘Abdallāh describes a wealthy, healthy, and powerful Constantinople, cosmopolitan, with a plethora of monuments and churches, and having recovered its important economic role. Nothing in his description accuses or condemns: quite the contrary, he divulges the pride of one who

⁶³ Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat*, 1:97.

⁶⁴ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat dimashq*, ed. S. al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Damascus, n.d.), 2.1:209–10. A third *ḥadīth* names the following five cities of paradise: Jerusalem, Ḥims, Damascus, Jibrīn, Dhofar; five from hell: Constantinople, al-Tunna, Antioch, Tadmur, and San‘ā’ (ibid., 211).

⁶⁵ Al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq* (as in note 26), 5:801.

⁶⁶ Izeddin, “Un texte arabe inédit.”

⁶⁷ Ibid.

has lived in a great city. ‘Abdallāh, like all our authors, has only praise for Constantinople. Indeed, in spite of the catastrophes that befell the Byzantine capital in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it remained, in our texts, a model of affluence and material magnificence.

The twelfth- and thirteenth-century Arabic-Islamic sources include a few major sites that repeatedly appear in Muslim sources. Although the authors copied one another, it is these sites, whether or not actually visited by our authors, that seem to have served as prototype symbols of Constantinople.⁶⁸ The list includes the Golden Gate, the Column of Justinian, the Column of Theodosius, the Horologium, the Bronze Horses, and Hagia Sophia.

According to al-Harawī, “the great church is Hagia Sophia.”⁶⁹ Al-Qazwīnī gives the following description:

The king’s church has a golden dome and ten gates: six of gold and four of silver. The place where the king stands is 4 by 4 arms’ lengths and is ornamented with pearls and rubies. . . . All the walls of the church are covered with gold and silver. There are twelve columns, each four arms’ length, and on top of each is a statue of a human, a king, a horse, a lion, a peacock, an elephant, or a camel. Next to it is a container which, when filled, brings the water up to the statues. On Palm Sunday . . . they fill the divisions of the container with oil, wine, honey, rose water, and vinegar, which are all scented. . . . As the container is covered, the liquids flow out from the mouths of the statues.⁷⁰

Similarly, al-Dimashqī describes “the Great Church, where it is said that an angel resides and where lies a colossal high altar with huge doors and columns.”⁷¹ Al-Jazarī also includes a description of Hagia Sophia provided by the merchant ‘Abdallāh: “The church is one of the most considerable and marvelous buildings that we can see. The place in which they stand for praying is surrounded by grills. . . . On the walls of this church are represented all the cities of the world and all the crafts. When one of them wants to choose a craft for his son, he takes him to the walls and shows him the crafts.”⁷²

Another main monument is the column of Justinian. Ibn Jubayr, al-Qazwīnī, Yāqūt, and al-Jazarī all provide lengthy descriptions of the column of Justinian which are essentially the same version. Ibn Jubayr states that on top of a bronze column is placed the equestrian statue of Constantine. Constantine has his right hand upward and his palm opened as if pointing toward the realm of Islam. In his left hand he holds a globe. “Opinions vary concerning this monument. Some think that the globe is a talisman with power

⁶⁸ Ian Richard Netton has called a number of sites that appear in Muslim descriptions of Cairo “the medieval tourist paradigm.” I. R. Netton, “Tourist Adab and Cairene Architecture: The Medieval Paradigm of Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa,” in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James Bellamy*, ed. M. Mir (Princeton, 1993), 275–84.

⁶⁹ Al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt*, 56.

⁷⁰ Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 603–4.

⁷¹ Al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, 227.

⁷² Al-Jazarī in Izeddin, “Un texte arabe inédit.” ‘Abdallāh was mistaken about the location of the libraries. See R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine* (Paris, 1950), 161–62.

to inhibit the enemy from invading their country; others say that the globe holds an inscription that says: I have possessed the world and I held it in my hand like this globe; I left it without carrying off anything.”⁷³ Al-Harawī similarly talks about the talismanic nature of the statue: “in his hand is a talisman that prevents the enemy from invading the country.”⁷⁴

One other monument mentioned relatively often is the column of Theodosius. Al-Harawī includes its description in his work: “There is a white marbled column in the market . . . entirely covered with three-dimensional sculptures of admirable skill.” It is surrounded by a grill that includes a talisman. If one climbs to the top of the column, he can have a panoramic view of the city in its entirety. “In my *kitāb al-‘ajā’ib* I will . . . talk about the veneration the inhabitants of this land profess for it and for the figures that cover it.”⁷⁵ Although al-Harawī mentions the talismanic element of this column, he does not explain what kind of power it holds. The Byzantine texts seem to imply that the column announced the future of the city.⁷⁶

Al-Qazwīnī gives some details of the Horologium, the clock that so impressed the Arab authors: “In the lighthouse of Constantinople there is a Horologium which is made up of twelve doors, each representing an hour. At every hour, one of the doors opens and a statue comes out. . . . The Byzantines say that it is the work of the wise Bīnās” (Apollonius).⁷⁷ Al-Qazwīnī also attributes to Apollonius the creation of the three bronze horses, a talisman located at the gate of the imperial palace to prevent the horses of the city from making noise or neighing.⁷⁸

The majority of the monuments and statues mentioned in our sources are endowed with talismanic or magical power. The talismanic objects found in Constantinople are not unique to it. The talismanic protection of antique cities is a theme of medieval Arabic literature. Al-Qazwīnī states in the introduction to his geography that strange talismans were created by the wise philosophers, *ḥukamā’*, for the defense of cities,⁷⁹ and various earlier authors such as Ibn al-Faqīh and al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956) mention several talismans in various ancient Near Eastern cities.⁸⁰ Indeed, *Rasā’il ikhwān al-safā’* include the science of talismans,⁸¹ and the tenth-century Ibn al-Nadīm wrote at the beginning of the section dealing with books of magic that “one group of philosophers and servants of the stars assert that they have talismans based on [astronomical] observations.” Ibn al-Nadīm further states that “this art is divulged openly among the philosophers” and goes on to give a biographical entry of Apollonius the Wise, “one of the people of Tyana, in

⁷³ Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 49. For similar descriptions see Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 605, and Yāqūt, *Mu’jam al-buldān*, 4:348–49. On the column, see Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 78–80.

⁷⁴ Al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt*, 49.

⁷⁵ Al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt*, 49. See Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 84–85.

⁷⁶ Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 85.

⁷⁷ Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 605–6.

⁷⁸ Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 606.

⁷⁹ Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 8.

⁸⁰ See G. Calasso, “Les remparts et la loi, les talismans et les saints: La protection de la ville dans les sources musulmanes médiévales,” *BEODam* 44 (1993): 83–104.

⁸¹ J. C. Burgel, “On Some Religious, Cultural and Social Implications of the Occult Sciences in Medieval Islam,” in *The Feather of Simurgh* (New York–London, 1988), 27–52.

the Byzantine territory” and “the first to initiate speech about talismans.”⁸² Apollonius was referred to, in various early Arabic-Muslim sources, as *ṣāhib al-tilaṣmāt*, or “father of talismans.” In fact, the reputation of Apollonius was such that several Arabic works dealing with astrology, alchemy, and magic, among others, have been falsely attributed to him.⁸³ It was the connection between the “Byzantine” Apollonius and talismans that probably led to the prevalent belief in the Islamic sources of the excessive presence of talismans in the Byzantine capital.⁸⁴ This assumption continued unabated and even increased in the texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which managed to assign talismanic power to a relatively larger number of monuments. This has partly to do with the proliferation of books on cosmography such as those of al-Qazwīnī and al-Dimashqī, which, with their wondrous elements, became popular starting in the late twelfth century.

In addition to all these typically Byzantine monuments, the geographers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries mention the Islamic monuments of the city. They reproduce the legend of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, a Companion of the Prophet, who participated in the expedition against Constantinople in the year 48–49/668–9. Al-Qazwīnī mentions his tomb, beneath the walls of Constantinople, and says that its soil is venerated by the Byzantines, who go there in their prayer for rain during drought. Ibn al-Athīr and al-Dimashqī also mention the tomb of Abū Ayyūb who fought in Badr and was with the fourth caliph, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, in Ṣiffīn.⁸⁵

The second important Islamic monument mentioned in our sources is the mosque connected with the name of Maslama, the leader of the most important expedition against Constantinople, in 97–99/715–717. This mosque is also mentioned in conjunction with the restoration of Constantinople to the Byzantines in 660/1261. Ibn Jubayr states that the Byzantine emperor rebuilt Maslama’s mosque in 455/1263. Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir (d. 692/1291) states that while the ambassador from Egypt was touring Constantinople with al-Ashkarī, the Laskarid, they came to the mosque built by Maslama. Saladin had wanted at one time to reconstruct this mosque, but the Byzantines had refused. According to Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, God postponed this deed, so that it would be God’s reward for al-Zāhir, and a glory for his state.⁸⁶

Thus, as late as the late thirteenth century, and despite the recent destruction of the city by the Latins, Constantinople’s symbolic importance had not diminished. Rebuild-

⁸² Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (Cairo, n.d.), 443–44, 448; trans. in B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm* (New York, 1970), 2:726.

⁸³ See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Kitāb sirru al-khalīqa wa ṣin‘at al-ṭabī‘a: Kitāb al-‘ilal*, ed. U. Weisser (Aleppo, 1979), 10.

⁸⁴ This, and the fact that Byzantine authors down to the 12th century continued to describe the talismans that Apollonius erected in various cities. See W. L. Dulière, “Protection permanente contre des animaux nuisibles assurée par Apollonius de Tyane dans Byzance et Antioche: Evolution de son mythe,” *BZ* 64 (1970): 247–77.

⁸⁵ Al-Qazwīnī, *Athār*, 606; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 3:93; and al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, 227.

⁸⁶ Ibn ‘Abd Al-Zāhir, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-malik al-Zāhir*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Khuayṭir (Riyadh, 1976), 129, 131. For a very similar passage, see M. M. Taher, “La mosquée de Constantinople à l’époque byzantine d’après un manuscrit arabe (BN de Paris),” *Byzantiaka* 11 (1991): 117–27.

ing this mosque in Constantinople brought glory and prestige to the Muslim ruler and symbolized the extent of his power and influence. Equally important is the development of amicable relations between the restored Byzantine Empire and the Egyptian state. Faced with the same enemies, the Byzantine–Egyptian alliance served as a counterweight to Western, Mongol, and Turkish threats. The good relations extended into the reign of Sultan Qalāwūn, who exchanged sworn undertakings in 1281 with Emperor Michael VIII (1259–82) in which they agreed to maintain love and friendship without limit of time.⁸⁷

A few sources refer to two additional Muslim tombs in Constantinople. Both al-Dimashqī and al-Harawī mention a tomb for a descendant of al-Ḥussayn, son of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and grandson of the Prophet Muhammad,⁸⁸ while al-Zuhrī mentions the tomb of Abū ‘Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ, a Companion of the Prophet, who played a pivotal role in the history of early Islam and who, furthermore, belongs to *al-‘ashara al-mubashshara*, the ten believers to whom paradise was promised. Al-Zuhrī states that Abū ‘Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ died during Maslama’s expedition and was buried in front of the walls of Constantinople and that to the present day the *Rūm* light candles at his tomb.⁸⁹ Although Al-Zuhrī may be confusing the tombs of Abū Ayyūb and Abū ‘Ubayda,⁹⁰ the proliferation of the names of such prominent and revered personalities around Constantinople testifies to the high esteem and quasi- veneration in which Constantinople was held in our sources. Manuela Marin has mentioned the importance of the presence of Islamic monuments in Constantinople in providing a symbolic possession of the city.⁹¹ The existence of Islamic monuments linked to major figures of Islamic mythology Islamizes and sacralizes the Byzantine capital, providing Constantinople with the semblance of a Muslim genealogy.⁹² It is in fact the presence of these burials within the walls of the city that permitted the inclusion of Constantinople in a repertoire of places of pilgrimage like that of al-Harawī.

Constantinople is clearly at the center of the picture. The great majority of references to the Byzantine Empire are really references to Constantinople. The Arab authors concentrated on the marvels of the city and on its Islamic monuments: talking about Constantinople was talking about a number of monuments that subsumed the entire city.

Thus the idea of Constantinople and the fascination felt about it remained at the center of our literature. The Byzantine Empire continued to be defined by its capital. The Arab authors are moved by Constantinople’s diversity, opulence, the many marvels to which they impute talismanic powers, and, of course, the monuments endowed with Muslim religious connotations. In their descriptions, the city is harmonious, orderly, and

⁸⁷ For the text of the treaty in English, see P. M. Holt, *Early Mameluk Diplomacy (1260–1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalawūn with Christian Rulers* (Leiden, 1995), 122–28.

⁸⁸ Al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, 227, and al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt*, 56.

⁸⁹ Al-Zuhrī, *Kitāb al-jughrāfiyā*, para. 117.

⁹⁰ M. Marin, “Rūm in the Works of Three Spanish Muslim Geographers,” *Graeco-Arabica* 3 (1984): 109–17.

⁹¹ M. Marin, “Constantinople en los geógrafos Arabes,” *Erytheia* 9.1 (1988): 49–60.

⁹² G. von Grunebaum, “The Sacred Character of Islamic Cities,” in *Mélanges Taha Hussein* (Cairo, 1962), 25–37; reprinted in *Islam and Medieval Hellenism: Social and Cultural Perspectives* (London, 1976).

organized. The authors do not talk about dilapidated, shabby Constantinople. It is as if the city survived all its catastrophes intact.⁹³ Constantinople succeeded in maintaining its reputation and prestige despite the fact that this period witnessed both its conquest by the Latins and the development of *faḍā'il al-quds* (merits of Jerusalem) literature.

Conclusion

This investigation has revealed both continuities and changes in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Muslim representation of the Byzantines. The texts persist in extolling Byzantine beauty and artistic skills, and the fascination that the Arab writers had for Constantinople continues unabated, although the city underwent decisive mutations announcing its decline.⁹⁴ At the same time, the old philosophical and moral slurs accompanied by empty rhetorical posturing have no longer any place in our texts. The Byzantines are not the target of accusations, for the Crusaders, with their “vulgarity” and their terrifying ways, were deemed unworthy inferiors in comparison with the sophisticated and refined Byzantines. The prince of Shayzar, Usāmah b. Munqiz, wrote in his memoirs: “When one comes to recount cases regarding the Franks, he cannot but glorify Allah and sanctify him, for he sees them as animals possessing the virtues of courage and fighting but nothing else.”⁹⁵ If, earlier on, the Muslims had been shocked by Byzantine “immorality,” they now seem to be more deeply shocked by Frankish “immorality” and behavior. Thus, whereas in the earlier image, the character, morality, and practices of the Byzantines were a main subject of Arabic-Islamic texts, the moral character of the Byzantines, with personal details and blatant judgments, are now absent. The *Homo byzantinus* seems to have been replaced by the Crusader, and the rhetoric on Byzantium, designed for home consumption, now shifted to the Franks. The omission of negative descriptions, with respect to the Byzantines, particularly on the more abstract moral plane, is itself a sign of the dawn of a new age.

The new wave of crusading conquests forced Muslim authors to view their traditional Byzantine foes, now greatly weakened, in a new perspective. The new political and military realities transformed the relations between Byzantium and Islam, hence the new appreciation. Once the Muslims understood the religious and psychological motivations of the Franks, they were quickly able to distinguish between *al-Rūm* and *al-Ifranj*. In addition, the new political alliance between the Byzantines and Saladin,⁹⁶ and later on between the Byzantine and Mamluk states, redirected Muslim animosity toward the Franks, while the Byzantines came to be viewed in much friendlier terms.

⁹³ In fact, the appearance of the city had changed, even before the sack of 1204. See P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge, 1993), 112–13.

⁹⁴ A. Ducellier, “Apogée et déclin d’une capitale,” in A. Ducellier and M. Balard, eds., *Constantinople: 1054–1261* (Paris, 1996), 18–38.

⁹⁵ P. Hitti, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh* (London, 1987), 161.

⁹⁶ C. Brand, “The Byzantines and Saladin, 1184–1192: Opponents of the Third Crusade,” *Speculum* 37 (1962): 167–81.

In addition to being influenced by events that conditioned their time and shaped the resulting perceptions, the texts continue as well a tradition inherited from previous ages. The presence of the Crusaders in the Near East was no doubt the major influence determining the selection of the information on Byzantium and the resulting diversion from the previous pattern. The sources reiterate earlier positive themes, discontinue a few negative motifs, and incorporate their new perceptions colored and accentuated by different filters and prisms affecting the traditional image. Our sources not only perceive Byzantium with more indulgence but also show positive appreciation. Our sources, influenced by contemporary developments, reveal a prismatic view that conveys the complexities of the new age.

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